

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय

SANTINIKETAN
VISWA BHARATI
LIBRARY

890.73(7)

R 66

THREE PAIRS' OF SILK STOCKINGS

THREE PAIRS
OF
SILK STOCKINGS
BY
PANTELEIMON ROMANOF



SUSIL GUPTA (INDIA) LTD.
36, CHOWRINGHEE - CALCUTTA

By arrangement with Ernest Benn Ltd.
March 1947

P R E F A C E

PANTELEIMON ROMANOF was introduced to the British public by a volume of short stories entitled *Without Cherry Blossom*, which appeared in the summer of 1930. He is one of the more mature writers in Soviet Russia. His latest novel has been published under two titles, *Comrades Kisliakof* and *Three Pairs of Silk Stockings*. The interest of the book may be considered to be focussed either upon the life of Hyppolit Kisliakof, an educated man who breaks with tradition and becomes a Bolshevik, or upon the drama of Tamara, the stage-struck nymph. Hence the two titles.

The whole novel, however, presents a remarkable picture of life as it is lived to-day in Moscow. In this respect, apart from the art with which it is written, it is a valuable book. For despite the great curiosity concerning Russia, no foreign visitor to the country seems to be able to give an account of it which is either intimate or intelligible. There has been an appalling propaganda barrage or smoke screen. In short, the new Russia has been cut off from the gaze of the West.

Since I have been debarred from entering Russia it has been my hobby to read most of the literature coming out of Soviet Russia in the original, partly for my own pleasure and instruction and partly with a view to having the more interesting books translated and published. As regards the latter, there is one test which I apply to Russian books at the present time: it is, do they answer the question—*How do the people live?* In my opinion almost any book which gives a credible answer to that question ought to be translated.

Romanof is a facile writer about sex. 'When a woman turns her back on you it may mean one of two things' he writes glibly. And the key sentence of the book as far as the title is concerned is the pronouncement of a foreigner in Moscow: 'The Russian woman has lost all moral standards. Give her three pairs of silk stockings and she is yours. Add a bottle of perfume in certain cases.'

But the interest of the book is much wider than sex. Tamara is a butterfly broken on a most elaborate wheel. That wheel is the new bolshevistic round of life which is most intimately and fascinatingly portrayed.

P R E F A C E

Possibly citizens of the Soviet Republic have been greatly exercised as to whether the death of Tamara was murder or suicide, but the Western reader may be attracted by a different question: What does this shrewd and capable communist writer really think of the state of affairs he so mercilessly describes? But in saying that I have stood long enough between the reader and an entrancing story.

STEPHEN GRAHAM

I

The investigation of the mysterious tragedy at the lodging of the science worker, Arcady Nesnamof, on Sadovaya, on the first of October, was barren of result. No conclusion was arrived at as to whether it had been murder or suicide.

The fact that the Caucasian dagger which was found under the armchair proved to belong to a worker in the central museum, who was a frequent visitor at the flat, seemed to indicate murder. The death had occurred during one of his visits, and the scream had been heard just after he entered the bedroom.

But if it was murder the evidence was against his having had any part in it.

There were some who believed they had a clue in certain events which took place early in August, about six weeks before the tragedy, but it is not really possible to deduce much from accidental meetings of the parties concerned. But if we presume to be innocent the man who was most suspected it is possible that the role of the other people in the case might be made more clear. For letters produced during the proceedings show very clearly the relationship of two other persons to the deceased, Doronin and Fomin, generally called Uncle Misha and Levotchka by Arkady Nesnamof and his wife. Moreover, a certain foreigner called Miller was implicated, and his connection with the dead woman provides an opportunity of arriving at a very definite theory of the crime.

When all this is taken into consideration it will be clear that the business began, not in August in Moscow, but much earlier in Smolensk. . . .

Perhaps the Press was nearer the truth when at the very beginning it observed that to find the solution one must look for some motive other than a criminal one. The journalists seized upon those letters as revealing not only the state of mind of the deceased, but of the educated class as a whole, pointing to a deep-rooted, frightful malady, which was eating into the soul of the intelligentsia, even of those who work for us in the regime.

One newspaper added that 'the intelligentsia should definitely, once and for all, re-examine its political position. At this historical moment in socialistic advance and of increasing class warfare one must either become an active fighter or quit the stage in the most literal sense.'

However, in spite of all the efforts of the investigating authorities, the criminal side of this tragic occurrence remained unsolved.

AUGUST OF THAT YEAR WAS QUITE WARM AND SUMMERY. THROUGH the bluish mist the morning sun shone on the glistening gilded domes of the Moscow churches and on the doors and windows of innumerable houses.

The pavements, watered and swept in the early morning, exhaled morning coolness on the shady side, and on the sunny side glistened as the stones dried quickly in the baking sun.

As each local and main line train arrived, the passengers, with their baskets, trunks and suitcases, trickled out into the square from the station like playthings from a box of toys. The almost total absence of cultured faces, of *bourgeois* hats, umbrellas and bowler hats was astonishing. People in red kerchiefs and caps crowded on to passing tramcars, or bargained with the mob of cabmen, and then flowed slowly off in various directions through the noise of the capital.

Anyone returning to Moscow after an absence of several years must have been astonished by the noise; heavy omnibuses rushed along the streets, hooting incessantly; tramcars, loaded with passengers, clattered over the crossings; from nearby side streets could be heard the deafening sound of the riveters at work on steel buildings.

To the accompaniment of this incessant racket, people flocked along the pavements.

Occasionally a stranger, wearing a cap and carrying a haversack, would stop in some narrow part of the pavement in order to allow approaching people to pass, but he would have to go on as they streamed towards him without end.

'What does it mean? Mother mine, has a water pipe burst somewhere?' he would say in desperation, looking to right and left.

It might be there would be some sort of parade in the streets. Processions of young men carrying banners often passed. Those in front walked with solemn faces, those in the middle and the rear chattered to one another and ran backward and forward from their ranks.

There were many red banners hanging across the streets, tied with strings to the lamp posts; and the passersby, as they walked beneath, raised their heads and read:

'The iron will of the working class will build up Socialism', or
'We must exclude from our organization all hostile and foreign elements.'

'Pass on there; don't waste your time, you can read at home,' shouted those behind, but immediately afterwards they themselves stopped in the middle of the street to watch some strange foreign-made machine which, under the control of two men in greasy overalls, was breaking up the old asphalt of the roads.

On one side street, behind a scaffolding of wooden planks and logs, a huge house was in process of erection. From this could be heard the noise of axes and the shouting and swearing of the workmen, who had blocked the passage down the side street with carts containing wood and building materials.

'Move on there!' a carter would shout. 'Why are you blocking up the whole street?'

'How can I move on? Do you want me to fly?' came the answer. The voice of a third was drowned by the clatter of falling logs and the screech of wooden planks torn away from the scaffolding.

'Here's a devil's Sodom,' the driver would say, and spit.

A passing squad of pioneers in blue jackets, led by a drummer, stops in perplexity before the carts.

'Where are you going?' shouts a driver. 'Can't you see there is no way through? Some of you have nothing to do but march about!'

In almost every side street scaffolding was rising, and in the squares, where before there had been stinking little shops, the asphalt was being broken up and the freed earth being set out with flower beds. Lamp posts were being put up, the old pavements were being destroyed and the streets were being widened; the cobbled road which had led to the main station was now being paved with asphalt.

Constructional steel and grey stone buildings in the new style, with long narrow balconies and flat roofs, were springing up on every hand.

Everything was possessed with a concentrated feverish energy, which drowned the chimes of the bells of the church standing in the side street.

II

THERE WAS ONE HOUSE IN THE MIDST OF THIS NEW CONSTRUCTION which struck one by its absolute negation of this intense activity. Its long narrow pointed windows, with iron netting, and its gloomy silent appearance made it resemble a church, and the innumerable small towers and spires on its roof added to this resemblance.

The heavy oak doors, with wrought iron handles, could only be opened with difficulty, and once opened dragged in with their weight the person who entered, so that he had to draw himself back.

As if in contradiction to the life in the street, the doors of this strange establishment remained closed until ten o'clock each morning. At ten o'clock they were opened by the hall porter, a respectable looking old man in white jacket and well polished boots. Under the door he placed a piece of stone, so that it would not close again; he moved his spectacles from his nose to his forehead straightened his back and glanced over the trees and roofs at the blue sky.

'What fine weather,' said he, turning to the porter who came into the street to sweep the pavement.

'It couldn't be better,' answered he, also looking round.

'Yes, what a blessing,' said the hall porter, and he re-entered the building to read his newspaper at the desk near one of the pillars of the building.

The enormous entrance hall, with its tall pillars, its arched painted ceiling and its infinitely long wide staircase with white statues, depressed the visitor with its gloomy splendour.

Weak rays of light filtered through the coloured glass somewhere in the roof, lighting up the statues on the staircase.

The sound of every voice or cough resounded dully under these portals, as in a church, filling the person who made the noise with an uneasy feeling.

After the stuffiness of the street the coolness of the stone arches and some sort of churchlike smell, probably from the oil colours on the walls and ceilings, and the solidity of the massive stone columns seemed to speak of an eternal immobility which challenged the noisy movement of the street.

This was the central museum.

Shortly after ten o'clock the employees began to arrive. Most of them had something in common with the building itself; if in the streets noisy people in caps and red kerchiefs predominated,

then here were people of refined appearance, the men in hats and overcoats and the ladies in modest dresses, with carefully dressed hair which they re-arranged in front of the mirror before going upstairs.

The hall porter, Sergey Ivanovitch, hurriedly removing the spectacles from his respectable bald head, rushed forward with extraordinary pleasure to help those entering to remove their clothes and constantly addressed one or the other with polite words:

‘What fine weather God is sending.’

The men were all dressed in tailored suits, striped summer shirts, ties, cuff links; there was not one among these people of the educated class who would have had the courage to break with convention and come in an open necked shirt with sleeves rolled up.

Just a few people of quite different appearance entered and went straight upstairs as they were, without overcoats and hats. These were Communist scouts and representatives of the workers.

There were watched in silence by the others.

Usually everyone came in a good temper, affable, like masters and colleagues meeting on their own property.

‘What news is there in the paper, Sergey Ivanovitch?’

‘Everything is being reorganized,’ he would answer, somewhat ironically, in the same tone as the question.

The men greeted politely and kissed the hands of the ladies, those of the elderly ones with a special politeness and respectfulness. It was obvious that here it was not the young but the older ladies kept up the traditions and gave a tone of politeness to everything. These people were continually saying: ‘You had the kindness to say’, and ‘Be so good as to convey’, and so on.

Sergey Ivanovitch liked and was proud of his establishment. He was proud of its cleanliness and good order, and of the fact that the employees were all polite, good-mannered and well-educated people who understood order; in wet weather no one came without goloshes, they did not throw cigarette ends about, did not spit, and each one gave him a tip at the end of the month.

But to-day there was not the usual repose on the faces of the employees: they did not hurry to go upstairs, but congregated in groups under the pillars and discussed something in low agitated whispers.

There was a stoutly built, imperious woman, with grey waved hair and a lorgnette which swung about at the end of a long cord beneath her waist. She was more excited than anyone else, stretched out her hands as a sign of astonishment and shrugged her shoulders, at the same time raising her eyebrows as though

puzzled by some agitating and unanswerable question. This was Marya Pavlovna Bakmutova, who worked in the foreign section of the library. Near her stood a tall old man of noble appearance, with a divided grey beard, and wearing a hat and an old-fashioned cape which he had not yet had time to take off. He was Andrey Ignatich Andrievsky, in charge of the pictures and porcelain section, to whom, as to a person in authority, they were addressing themselves for enlightenment.

'I don't understand what it means,' said Marya Pavlovna.

'It's the continuation and enforcement of something which began long ago,' answered Andrey Ignatich. 'But where is Hyppolit Grigorievitch? Perhaps he knows more of the details?'

'Sergey Ivanovitch, has Kisliakof arrived?'

'No, he has not.'

All at once everyone became silent. Through the door entered a strange man in tall boots and wearing a double-breasted jacket over a blue exercise shirt; he was about thirty-five years old, with a thin clean-shaven face. On his temple he had a scar, caused by a bullet, which had broken the bone of his temple and destroyed one eye, which was now replaced by an artificial one. Owing to this his face had a particularly cruel expression, because the glass eye added its unwinking severe expression to the ordinary glance of the living eye.

A strange quietness spread over the entrance hall as this man leisurely wiped his dusty boots on the mat near the door. Then he gave his grey cap to Sergey Ivanovitch, saying:

'Good morning, Comrade Moroshkin.'

Sergey Ivanovitch took the cap and with a bow answered:

'I hope you are well, Andrey Zaharovitch.'

As he took the cap to the stand he glanced at the employees.

The new arrival looked with some astonishment at the standing groups of employees, then somewhat awkwardly, with a sharp nod of his head, he began to ascend the stairs.

Marya Pavlovna looked through her lorgnette at his back and his boots.

'A notice has been put up in the library,' said Sergey Ivanovitch, having waited until the man with the glass eye had disappeared round a corner.

'What does it say?' asked Marya Pavlovna excitedly, directing her lorgnette on Sergey Ivanovitch.

'It is fixed for to-morrow.'

'It has started,' said she, letting go of her lorgnette and dropping her hands. 'Well, gentlemen, we must go. Perhaps Kisliakof is not coming.'

They all began to ascend the staircase, the ladies in front, the men politely allowing them to pass and following behind.

Upstairs there appeared before them a long row of large halls, with stone floors and arched ceilings with gilt ornamentation. These halls were filled with enormous yellow cases, behind the glass of which stood wax figures in all sorts of dresses. In other places could be seen ancient chariots, articles of the old Tsarist establishments and ancient peasant utensils. Near the walls stood cases containing diamond studded snuff boxes, and in the corners tall marble and jasper vases. There were halls filled with furniture of the Paul and Alexander I periods, with rough stone figures of women, some with all sorts of articles standing about without arrangement or piled up in the corners. There was a particularly large number of carved wooden salt cellars and ladles, such as might be seen on the stage in scenes of feasting in old Russia.

One hall was full of pictures of the old Russian school, darkened by time and looking like ikons, another was covered with ikons with old rizas of pearl, and a third was filled with a mass of ancient books musty with the odour of decaying bindings.

In this hall was hung the notice of which Sergey Ivanovitch had spoken. At first glance there was nothing of importance in it, it merely said that all the employees were invited to attend a meeting to be held on Friday and the signature was 'Andrey Polukhin, Director of the Museum.'

The employees looked at this notice with the lost expression of recruits looking at unexpected orders for mobilization. All were silent, because at the barrier sat a newly appointed 'stranger', dressed in a blue overall. Only the eyes of the ladies reflected how strongly they felt all this; most of the men stood with a sort of submissive, resigned expression which monks have, and in truth the tall dark Galahof, in his loose-fitting suit, with his narrow fine beard and always downcast eyes, really looked like a monk.

The fact was that this hitherto untouched islet of the educated class which this building represented threatened to be overwhelmed with the waves of present day realities. A month ago a new director—Comrade Polukhin—had been appointed, and with him 'the street', as Marya Pavlovna said, meaning the scouts and representatives of the workers, had started to drift in.

A few days before someone had spread a rumour that it was proposed to proletarianize the personnel, and that the director would call a meeting and make a statement. This rumour was confirmed by the appearance on the wall of the mysterious notice bearing the signature of the director.

'A letter for Hyppolit Grigorievitch,' said Sergey Ivanovitch, entering with a letter in his hand. Nobody spoke to him, and looking round he put the letter on one of the tables, grimaced,

shaking his head as he looked at the address, which was not written ordinarily but scrawled from one corner to the other.

‘Now, gentlemen, we must get to work on this,’ said someone. ‘We shall have to see how it goes.’

III

HYPPOLIT KISLIAKOF, ABOUT WHOM **MARYA PAVLOVNA** HAD INQUIRED, ex-engineer, and at present an employee at the central museum, arrived late at his post that day for two reasons. First there had been trouble at home, and second he had to see the doctor, who found that his nervous system was shattered and that sclerosis had set in. He hurried so that he might at any rate be there by eleven. He wore a rubberproofed overcoat, discoloured by the sun, a cap, and on his feet above his boots, bottle-shaped leggings which looked like the upper part of tall boots.

From time to time he stopped at the end of a street where the road was held up by motor cars and cabs passing in an unending stream; he would take off his cap and with a quick movement hurriedly wipe the perspiration from his hair with his handkerchief, looking through his pince-nez with impatience and irritation at the vehicles which crossed the road.

He had small, well-shaped ears and a sharply pointed little beard, a pale nervous face and a habit of turning round quickly, as in a frightened way, which was a sign of lack of balance and fretfulness of purpose. If he bumped into someone he would apologize in a hurried sort of way, and when on one occasion a cart knocked into him with the wooden box which he was carrying from his cart to a shop, Kisliakof's face had a cramped look of pain and impotent irritation.

He noticed in front of him a tall old beggar woman, an ex-aristocrat, leaning on a stick and standing silently with down-cast eyes.

He took out a twenty kopeck piece and gave it to her. The old woman lifted her head and in an emotional voice said:

'I thank you.'

Kisliakof felt a tickling sensation in his throat and was immediately annoyed because he had given her too little. He walked on thinking how astonished and happy she would have been if he had given her a whole rouble or even five roubles. Of course, he must do that. He glanced round. The old woman was looking in his direction. He felt, for some reason, a sensation of pleasure because of the consciousness of his own goodness, but at the turning of the road he saw another beggar woman of the same type. He always gave her something and she was already expecting his approach. He had only one rouble piece left and had no small change. 'If I don't give her anything it will be awkward, and a whole rouble—it would be a pity.' He pretend-

ed that he was looking for some shop and crossed to the other side of the street before he reached the old beggar. As he approached the museum a vague, indefinite, agitated condition awakened within him, possibly because he was late and had remembered that at the barrier sat a man in a blue overall who always scrutinized those who passed him; perhaps for some other reason. But now the slightest thing upset him; for example, the fact that two men who walked in front of him were occupying the whole pavement and he could not pass them because people were coming in the opposite direction, this irritated him beyond all measure; or that his overcoat was torn at the back and had been repaired by his wife, this made him shrink, as it seemed to him that all those who walked behind him were looking at this stitched place and thinking: "There goes one of the plucked members of the educated class."

At one place he had to retrace his steps from a side street and take a longer way round, because the bells were being removed from a dismantled church and the constable would not allow anyone to pass. In another place a company of Communist scouts with haversacks on their shoulders crossed his path and he had to wait until they had gone on. He looked at their gay sunburnt faces with impatience, and felt that the man in the blue overall would certainly be glancing at his empty chair.

At last Kisliakof found a way through and his face assumed a more composed expression.

In the entrance hall he took off his overcoat and turned it inside out, with the lining uppermost, so that the stitched place would not show. He was wearing a blue, probably old, well-cut jacket, a soft collar and grey small checked trousers with buttons at the knee. The attendant, Sergey Ivanovitch, hurriedly took off his spectacles and laid them on the newspaper, and took Kisliakof's overcoat and cap. When minor employees who at the end of the month only gave a few small silver coins entered, Sergey Ivanovitch only moved his spectacles from his nose to his forehead, but when the more important people who gave a rouble, or even two, entered, he always took off his spectacles, and by the degree of his haste in helping them off with the clothes one could judge his esteem of various people.

Kisliakof nervously arranged his cropped hair before the mirror, glancing at his reflection through his pince-nez, then ran up the staircase, passing the door of the library in order to see where the man in the blue overall was. He was sitting in his usual place. Kisliakof entered that hall and made it appear that he had been on the premises for a long time and had only been to some other part of the building on business and was now returning to the work he had left.

The heads of all the employees sitting at the tables were raised and they all looked at him. At this moment the man in the blue overall left the room. Kisliakof approached Marya Pavlovna and greeted her, kissing her hand. She kissed him on the forehead.* Coming from a poor, modest family, and having been in his time very radically and democratically inclined, Hyppolit Kisliakof now experienced a feeling of special pleasure when he, as a man of good breeding, approached the hand of an honourable lady, and she, as if fully acknowledging in him a man of her own class, kissed his forehead. The use of the French language, into which Marya Pavlovna so often lapsed, also gave him a feeling of great satisfaction. He himself did not know why, at the time of the upheaval, he had leaned, not in the direction to which in his youth he had given all his favour, but in that of good society.

Marya Pavlovna, keeping his hand in hers and looking into his eyes (she was seated and he was standing) said:

'You don't know anything?'

'No, what is it?' asked Kisliakof.

Marya Pavlovna explained to him in French what was the matter, adding in Russian the new word 'orabotchivanie', which means workmanizing or proletarianization, and pointing to the notice.

Kisliakof heard the news in silence and to outside appearances quietly, but he was aware of his heart trouble and became pale. The sense of imminent economic disaster made him feel that there was no need to do his work. But he was not frightened, he even experienced a sort of perverted joy in the situation.

Kisliakof went to his table and, looking on it over his pince-nez, saw the letter waiting for him. He immediately recognized the slanting handwriting of his friend Arkady Nesnamof, whom he had not seen for several years, as he worked in one of the biological institutes in a provincial town.

Kisliakof looked about the table for the paper knife, but could not find it, then he took out a little Caucasian dagger which he carried in his belt and used it to open the envelope. He smiled involuntarily at the well-known trait of Arkady, always doing things in a way opposed to established rule, even in such a small matter as the addressing of an envelope.

Arkady wrote:

'Greetings, old friend. I have learned by chance that you have settled yourself in Moscow, being either unfaithful to yourself or having changed. That is a question which I must put to you,

*Russian custom. As you bow to kiss a lady's hand, she at the same time kisses your brow—not always.

because we, members of the educated class, cannot do any sort of work except the work in which we believe, as honesty of thought and feeling is one of our great traditions. So who and what are you now? As before, one of us, or already an outsider? But of this I hope to hear from you verbally, as I, in the position of a professor, or as they now call it, science worker, am transferring to Moscow and have already taken a lodging of two rooms in the Sadovaya, which one of my friends, a charming and most agreeable man—Uncle Misha, as we call him—who also went to live in Moscow, has found for me.

‘Materially, things have turned out well for me, and I am also allowed wide scope in my scientific work, which I like, but . . . just here the honesty of thought and feeling interferes. One feels that one has not the right to work quietly when everything on which we base our lives, that is to say . . . but all about this when we meet. I am glad that on the 1st October, my birthday (forty already), I shall be with you.

‘In conclusion I must tell you (what unexpected news for you) that I have a handsome young wife. But you will see for yourself. Perhaps at the age of forty it is unreasonable for such a bear as myself to unite with a young girl, but you will see what a girl it is and will understand and forgive my unreasonableness.’

At this stage of the letter Kisliakof thought of his own stout elderly wife, Elena Victorovna, and suddenly felt jealous that Arkady, a man with a splendid character, but awkward and shy, had proved more lucky than he in this direction.

He felt a consuming impatience to see his friend and his young wife more quickly. Using the right of being an intimate friend of Arkady, he felt somehow a tender, half-related feeling towards her, the thought flashed through his mind that the evenings of his own life, warmed by a romantic friendship and cousinly tenderness towards a young woman, would not be so dull.

He finished reading the letter.

At this moment Andrey Ignatich approached him and, patting him on the shoulder, said:

‘Now, old fellow, what do you think of the present situation?’

‘I have expected it for a long time,’ answered Kisliakof.

‘Yes, but that was, as you might say, in theory, and now we are face to face with real facts.’

‘Ah, it’s all the same,’ said Kisliakof with a strange expression and a wave of the hand.

The state of agitation he was in was the more annoying because it was the namesday of his wife and she had asked him to invite friends. In two days’ time she was to go away on a visit to relatives on the Volga. He was looking forward to being without

her, and his solitude, in some way to pull himself together and think out what life meant to him.

Now, instead of this, he was again experiencing that disquietude and nervous irritation which had lately been the main feature of his life.

When work was over he went to draw his salary, two hundred roubles, with an additional fifty roubles expenses for an official journey. He hoped to keep these fifty roubles to himself and not give them to his wife. They would make things a little more easy and he would not have to count the kopecks and ask his wife for everything. She was very careful in money matters and accounted for every rouble.

He thought now what a pity it was that in an attempt to please her he had told her that he was to receive these fifty roubles, but he decided that she would not remember, as it was a long time since he had told her.

When he stood in the queue he experienced that familiar disgusted feeling which he had had so often of late. He felt ashamed that he should be standing there: he, a personality, an individuality unlike anyone else in the queue. What there was shameful in it he did not know, but this feeling was as strong and unbearable as the one he felt about the stitching on the back of his coat. Perhaps it was because of the fact that since he had left his real occupation and entered this museum he felt himself a sort of deserter. Everything in the new conditions which jarred reminded him painfully of the inner unreality of his present life.

He invited Andrey Ignatich, Galahof and Gusev to the names-day celebration.

'What, to console you?' joked Gusev. 'In any case, thank you. It is most opportune. Shall I bring the wife?'

'Certainly, certainly,' said Kisliakof hurriedly, and he went home.

IV

THE ENORMOUS HOUSE IN WHICH HYPOLIT KISLIAKOF LIVED STRUCK one by its imposing facade. On every one of its five floors were pretty balconies, with ornaments and bronze banisters resembling baskets of flowers. The whole house glistened from the outside with the freshness of the new pink paint, along the pavements were urns for cigarette ends, and in the evenings it glistened with lights from windows of its five stories.

The huge entrance hall, with its plate glass windows, was cluttered up with a large number of children's perambulators. In this hall there was a blackboard with the names of the tenants, and near it a fly-marked sheet of paper on which was written:

'Citizens, preserve your strength and use the lift.'

On the lift itself was a similar piece of paper, with the same amount of fly spots, on which was written:

'The lift is not working.'

When it had been started, after being overhauled, it was broken again by tenants who, returning from a gay party, decided to see whether it could carry more weight than was mentioned in the instructions. For this reason all the tenants now had to go up on foot, and in the evenings, if the electric lamps which lit the staircase happened to have been stolen, they had to grope their way, stumbling and frightening each other in the darkness. These lamps, in spite of the fact that they were protected by iron nets and placed at an impossible height, were, nevertheless, continually stolen. The management of the house had for a long time past decided to dispense with them, and the tenants themselves would not buy them.

On each door was a card bearing a list of tenants, and against the family name of each occupant stood a number, showing how many times to ring.

The bells usually went through four stages in their existence. First, there appeared near the door new wooden lacquered rosettes with a white button in the centre. Then the rosettes with the buttons disappeared and there remained only two copper plates on a round wooden base. Then the wooden base disappeared and just the ends of the wire stuck out. Now the bells were rung by connecting the two ends together, and when these two ends went everyone had to bang desperately on the door with their fists. In this case the number of knocks was always being muddled, causing continuous quarrelling in the flats.

Kisliakof approached the entrance hall from the street with the

intention of running quickly up the stairs to the third floor (among other things the doctor, it must be said, had advised him to take things quietly), and after dining to take a rest after his labours. But on approaching the door he spat with annoyance. The main entrance was locked and on the inside of the glass of the door was pasted a strip of paper on which was written clumsily: 'The main staircase is closed for the washing of the stairs. Entrance at the back.'

Although the staircase was only washed once a week it seemed to Kisliakof that it was done every day. He went across the yard to the back staircase.

The yard of this house was enclosed on all four sides by tall buildings, so that if one wanted to see the sky from the yard one had to thrust one's head back as though looking up at a tower.

The first thing in the yard which caught the eye was drying linen, which hung on ropes tied in every direction, and the incredible numbers of children and dogs. Nearly all the children were of proletarian extraction (of the same order were the perambulators in the main hall), and the dogs, in most cases, were of the *bourgeois* type, flighty fox terriers running round the yard in circles, proud bulldogs, Alsatians running about nervously like wolves. There were also some white long-haired Spitzens, looking like fluffy balls of cotton wool, invariably wearing blue ribbons, and there were some mongrels.

The house was inhabited in part by people of the educated class and partly by proletarians. The latter had a preponderance of children and the people of the educated class—dogs.

During the hours when the dogs were taken out for a walk the yard was transformed into a pandemonium; the dogs, being set at liberty, rushed about as though they were mad. The unsuspecting visitor putting his nose in the yard gate would close it hurriedly, seeing all at once five or six bounding dogs, and the owners in a chorus of voices would shout to him to come in as the dogs would not bite.

If the visitor timorously entered the yard another band of dogs of all manner of breeds would immediately rush at him. Some wagged their tails, others sniffed at his coat, others threw up their heads and barked. The owners continued to urge that the dogs would not touch him and only barked to greet him, not in an angry way, but to invite him to stroke them.

On the back staircase the visitor, as with steam in a hot bath, was immediately enveloped in smoke and the frying smells from the kitchen. In the corner of each landing, opposite the door opening on the kitchen, stood boxes and pails filled with all sorts of kitchen refuse—cucumber parings, egg shells, water melon rind,—some could not contain all this litter and pieces were scat-

tered round them on the floor and even on the steps, where the children, when playing, kicked the water melon rind from one to another.

Here also were dirty bedraggled cats.

The lodging in which Hyppolit Kisliakof lived contained ten families—twenty-seven people.

The long corridor with doors on both sides was completely filled with trunks, baskets and cupboards.

The quantity of articles made the corridor quite dark, and the tenants who went from lavatory or kitchen to their own rooms were always bumping their foreheads or bruising their knees, cursing those who had put all this rubbish there, in spite of the fact that their own things occupied no little space and that it was not at all certain whether they bumped against their own or someone else's belongings. The flat, in contradiction to the exterior, produced the impression of a furniture shop or depository where, after an auction, everything had been thrown in a heap.

Near the main door was the telephone and the wall all round it was covered with telephone numbers and drawings of women's faces. The clothes rack was empty, as the tenants were all afraid to hang their clothes there in case they should be stolen.

In a small corridor near the kitchen was the lavatory, which was always in use, occupied in the morning, occupied during the day, occupied at night.

'Who the devil is sitting there?' one would say in despair, tired of running backward and forward from his room to the lavatory. This could be explained to a certain extent by the fact that combined with the lavatory was the bath.

The occupants of the flat were of such different composition as though at the time of a flood they had rushed here, bringing with them in their haste whatever they could lay their hands on. Actually, there were two-thirds people of the educated class and one-third of the proletariat. Among the latter were two locksmiths with their families and a group of plasterers, who left a white trail from their doors to the lavatory.

Just near the telephone at the entrance was the room of Pechonkina, a woman of the lower middle class. Through the door, which she nearly always left open, could be seen an iron bedstead, covered with a patch-work quilt and a heap of feather cushions, a commode, with a plaster cat and an enlarged photograph of her husband, spotted by flies. This woman thrust her head out at every knock and always knew who visited whom.

Next to her lived the Kisliakofs and next to them a young married couple of the name of Zvenigorodsky, very cultured people, who were regarded in the flat as an exemplary couple. Both were tall and well-built. He was an architect and always

went about in a hat and carried his overcoat over his arm, she wore a close-fitting little hat, thrust well down over her ears, and a close-fitting blue costume. They were called the inseparables and always went out together, distinguishing themselves with extraordinary correctness and politeness.

Next to them was the room of the couple Diakonov, the former owners of the whole flat. The husband was a tall, silent and resigned man, who did the shopping and prepared the coffee in the kitchen. His wife, a tall, well-developed woman, never rose early, and began her day with noisy talk. She screamed at everybody, at those who remained a long time in the lavatory, at those who made mistakes in the number of knocks. She was annoyed with all of them because they were living in her flat. She was always fighting and going to law with the lower middle class woman about a dark storage cupboard which the latter had appropriated and would not give up. They had a son about fifteen years old (the only offspring of the educated class in the whole flat) and they did not know what to do with him, as no one would employ him. He was of a definitely criminal type, would not take advice, was not afraid of punishment and even threatened to cut the throats of his parents.

Further along lived an old professor with his wife. He was short and baldheaded, and always went about with slackened trousers. He made himself a nuisance by shaking his trousers every morning outside his door, which was opposite the room of the Kisiakofs. This annoyed Elena Victorovna more than anything. The wife of the professor had two small pug-nosed Japs, with long, hanging ears. They were very inoffensive and timid, and very quietly made dirt in every corner.

On the opposite side of the corridor lived a statistician, a tall man, who left the bath and each morning with such dishevelled hair that all the large dogs barked at him and the small Japs rushed with all speed to their room.

The last two rooms, numbered 9 and 10, were occupied by some good-looking lady, who went along to the bath each morning in a lilac shawl, and another lady, a pensioner, who lived in fear that her pension would be taken away from her. In her view it could be taken away for two reasons: either because after examination they might find her capable of working, or because they might see that she had good furniture in her room. For this reason the whole day long she was never without a cigarette in her mouth, smoking in order to weaken her heart, and she kept her room in an impossible state, having given the best of her furniture to the wife of the professor. The floor of her room was absolutely coated with dirt, because she was afraid to polish it, and she was always untidy, trudging about in slippers and in

a torn morning gown with rolled up sleeves. For going to draw her pension she wore a special costume: a very old costume and a black kerchief. In ordinary circumstances she wore a mantle, certainly not new, but with a silk lining, and a hat.

Quite apart, with a separate entrance, lived a high Soviet official, Natanson. Every morning a motor car came for him and hooted for a long time under the window. He was treated by everyone with respect and consideration.

The dogs started the day. The moment the steps of the milk-woman were heard on the back staircase the Natanson's dogs began to bark and to scratch at the door with their paws. They were answered by the Japs, first from behind the closed door, then when they were let out and ran on their short legs into the corridor, turning right and left and yelping, with their heads thrust up.

In response to this someone would angrily bang a door which was not tightly closed and through which the noise of the barking had entered and awakened the occupant. In most cases it was the statistician and he would usually shout:

'They have made a kennel of the place. There is no peace here, either by day or by night!'

The lower middle class woman would go along to the kitchen in an old print dress, with slippers on her bare feet and her thin hair fastened with hairpins in a knot at the back.

For some reason her passing always coincided with the opening of the door of the professor's room and the shaking of his trousers in the corridor. There was generally an altercation between the two; the professor, in his night attire, hid himself in his room and only thrust the trousers out with his hands; for this reason he could not see who was passing.

Then one after another the doors began to open and the tenants to appear.

The tall, gloomy Diakonov would pass along with his coffee pot to the kitchen. The pensioner would sweep out from her door the cigarette ends which had accumulated during the night.

In the morning the occupants of the flat were particularly sensitive to the various inconveniences and to all the remarks of their neighbours: it was as though after floating in their dreams during the night to higher spheres they had awakened once again to find themselves in the sickening society of their neighbours.

Nearly every morning the dogs barked at the statistician when they saw his dishevelled hair as he emerged with a towel round his neck from the bathroom, and he, quite flushed, would shout to Madam Natanson:

'If your dogs bark at me I will lodge a complaint at the court!'

'But they will not bite you.'

'It would be worse for them if they did, the devil knows! These are not apartments but kennels. Why don't you take a cottage somewhere and embrace your dogs there!'

Then someone going along the corridor would suddenly slip and, glancing behind on the floor, would agitatedly begin to examine his boots and shout into the air:

'Clear away this dirt and these beastly Japs, or I will choke the life out of them.'

The Japs, if they were in the corridor taking part in the general awakening of life, immediately understood to whom this exclamation was directed and, lowering their ears, rushed into their own room. They were received like hurt children by the professor's wife, who would open the door on hearing the commotion in the corridor.

Life in the kitchen began at full swing. The milk brought by the milkwoman was put into various saucepans. The oil stoves were lit, and if the electricity bill had been delivered the atmosphere in the kitchen would immediately become thick, and one heard the yelping, clamorous voice of the chief gossip and scandalmonger.

In this overcrowded space the dogs and children got under everybody's feet. Sometimes there was a ring; if it was a long and imperative one then some one of the tenants paled, especially the pensioner and Sophia Pavlovna. Sometimes the ring was short and timid, followed by two short ones. This was probably some early visitor moving about in the darkness of the staircase and not quite sure how many times to ring.

Inside the flat there would be arguments as to whether it was one ring or two, or the full three! Somebody would eventually answer the door, but if it appeared that the visitor had made a mistake he would shout:

'Are you blind? Can't you see? Three rings for the Diakonovs!'

'But I gave three rings.'

'The devil knows how many times you rang'—and, banging the door in the visitor's face—'I wear out the soles of my boots, running to the door!'

There were only two things on which the occupants of the flat agreed. First—the books. As apparently there was no money for buying books they were lent about. These books (chiefly by foreign authors, they did not believe in their own) soon became bulging and soiled. The second thing which united them was the crockery, which also was freely lent by one to another when there were guests.

All other matters were in dispute. In a sense it was not a flat

but a powder magazine. Not a day passed but there were little explosions, and the powder was always kept dry.

Pretexts for explosions presented themselves at every turn. First—the lavatory: from morning on there congregated near it a queue of citizens hurrying to their work, some showing signs of impatience, and the one in front had not the time to get in and lock the door before fists were banging on the door, reminding him that he was not in his own drawing-room.

When the one who had made most noise disappeared inside and stayed there for some time, the others began to abuse him.

The bath got into such a condition that after one cursory glance few would care to use it. In any case they would not have had time to undress before one or two others would be banging on the door.

In addition the place was dark, and from the ceiling, above which was the lavatory of the next floor, water dripped continuously on the head, and collected on the floor in a pool which sometimes reached up to the skirting. For this reason there were always several bricks there, and each occupant stepped on them, trying to keep his balance as he forded the lavatory floor.

No one would go for a plumber on principle: 'Let those who made it dirty go!' The former owner of the flat only gloated over this state of affairs and said that with all these pigs in the place nothing else could be expected. They had seized somebody else's flat and did not know how to live in it like human beings.

The next point of misunderstanding was the kitchen, where from morning on, as in a busy factory, six oil stoves worked and buzzed at once. In the fumes one could only see the backs and bare elbows of the women-tenants in their morning dresses with slippers on their feet. Here they were for ever fussing over the use of pots or spilt refuse. When the former owner appeared on the scene the place became Sodom itself.

But the chief cause of misunderstanding was the dirt all over the building, and no one wanted to clean it up. No repairs were made in the places of general use.

Then not a day passed but one or other of the tenants lost something. Even the Primuses disappeared and then everyone said that the thief was the son of the former owner of the flat, but things continued to disappear even when he was out of the house.

So they all fixed up boxes for themselves in the kitchen. Saucepans and frying pans, everything was locked up after the food was prepared, or, alternatively, they were carried in a heap by the tenants to their rooms.

At last, as a precautionary measure against dirt and the disappearance of things, they arranged that each one in turn should act as a sort of supervisor.

V

AS HYPOLIT KISLIAKOF STOPPED ON THE LANDING, PRESSING HIS heart, he suddenly heard shrieks in the lodging. His first thought was that he was being deprived of his room, as in the midst of everything he could distinctly hear the cries of his wife, and as his room, owing to its size, was coveted by all the other tenants he was already accustomed to continuous attacks.

However, when he entered the trouble appeared much simpler. The professor's wife, a tall, thin, old-fashioned lady in pince-nez, had washed her Japs in the bath. She had been caught in the act of carrying them to her room, wrapped in a sheet.

'Washing your dogs where we wash our children! You dirty hussy!' the wife of the plasterer was shrieking.

'Go to blazes with your children!' shrieked the professor's wife, boiling with rage and pressing to her bosom the Japs, who, frightened to death, thrust their noses and frightened eyes out from the sheet.

Elena Victorovna, short and stout, occupied all day with household duties, had had no time to dress, and was standing there in a pink overall. She also was shouting.

Seeing her husband she stopped immediately and went into the room.

Judging from her back, and because she moved without waiting for him to reach her, Kisliakof felt that something other than the disturbance about the dogs was annoying her.

'You got the money?' asked she the moment he followed her into the room.

'I got it,' said Kisliakof with a resentful feeling, observing to himself that the first thing she asked about was the money, and that she would take it all, to the last kopeck, and if he had not had the presence of mind to put the fifty roubles separately he would, after her departure, have to live on what she would leave him, reckoning everything up to the last kopeck.

Calming herself with his affirmative answer, Elena Victorovna said, with an irritation which she probably could not control:

'How people have become bad! Just imagine, the ideal pair--divorced! He has found some other lady love. His wife is demanding two hundred and fifty roubles a month and he will only give one hundred and fifty; he has no sense of duty or of his obligations, it is a good thing they have no children!'

Her gesticulations caused her overall to fly open, she fastened it angrily and went on:

'Didn't she look after him? But nowadays people only think of themselves and their bellies. What rotters!'

But her irritation made Kisliakof suddenly angry with his wife, and he even envied Zvenigorodsky, who had just been divorced and had taken a young woman to wife. But he just looked at Elena Victorovna through his pince-nez and said nothing.

He was reminded that Elena Victorovna was five years older than he and was also short and stout, always in this pink overall with green fastenings, probably thinking that in this attire she looked charming.

In her rude attack on the divorced husband he felt a round-about attack on himself, as though she was speaking about men in general, being certain of her absolute right to continuous adoration and devotion, even though she was stout and well over forty.

All these thoughts merely flashed through his mind as they usually did when they argued, had he uttered even a hundredth part of such thoughts he knew what the result would be—there would be a drama which would last a whole week. Because of this he was reserving the expression of such thoughts for some special occasion when his annoyance with this small monotonous life reached its limits. How and when this occasion would come he did not know.

At this moment Elena Victorovna's aunt returned from the market with two dogs: a gloomy bulldog and an alert, noisy fox terrier. The aunt, who was wizened and had false hair, wore an old-fashioned dyed dress. She darted quickly behind her screen, where she vanished every time she heard heated talk between husband and wife.

'Now give me the money,' said Elena Victorovna, her anger probably being curbed by the arrival of the aunt.

Kisliakof put his hand in his pocket and by mistake nearly took out the fifty instead of the two hundred roubles.

'Here are two hundred,' said he, and 'at the same moment he got proof that nothing could be hidden from Elena Victorovna. How many times he had attempted it, and how they had all ended in disaster!'

'And where are the fifty?'

'What fifty?'

'Those you had to receive for your official journey.'

'Ah yes, those. They are here. I put them separately,' said Kisliakof. By the suspicious and silent glance which Elena Victorovna gave him he understood that she treated him as a swindler, and was not even annoyed, not frightened by this lie, but simply decided that she must be careful to count every kopeck.

This at once reduced him to a condition of extreme irritation

and despair over his absolute dependency and this humiliating supervision.

Again he did not express his feelings, but his face showed that he was upset and his heart was beating painfully and disagreeably.

'Did you invite the guests?'

'Yes.'

'How many?'

'There will be nine altogether, including ourselves and your aunt.'

'So long as there are no more than nine,' said Elena Victorovna. 'Now sit down to dinner. Aunt, sit down, do sit down, you can do that later.'

Kisliakof sat down, still wearing the same displeased morose expression. In addition to the disagreeable feeling which the talk with his wife had left he was annoyed by the presence of the dogs and of the aunt.

Perhaps half of his nervousness and sclerosis was caused by the presence of the aunt and the dogs in the room.

One dog, Jerry, the fox terrier, which was white with black spots, annoyed him with his piercing bark. At the most distant sound or ring on the bell he jumped from his mat and, lifting his front leg and one ear (the other he had always folded up), barked piercingly and resoundingly, so that Kisliakof trembled every time as though someone has thrust a red-hot poker in his side.

The other dog, the gloomy, large-headed bulldog, with hanging lip and stump of a tail, distinguished himself with a mysterious look, and made existence unpleasant by the fact that he always occupied the armchair at the side of the writing-desk. When Kisliakof went to move him off he looked at him with a mysterious and threatening look and started to growl, giving the impression that he might even bite.

Only on rare occasions, probably when in a good humour, he would approach his master and, thrusting his thick muzzle into his hand, would demand a caress. Kisliakof would stroke him with a feeling of displeasure, thinking to himself that in addition to everything else he must play up to this beast.

During dinner he always seated himself on the floor at Kisliakof's side and, without taking his eyes off him, would wait for pieces.

The aunt depressed him with her meekness and humility. She probably felt that she had no right to live in the same room with the couple, and therefore tried every moment to efface herself. She moved so quietly that one could hardly hear her, she talked only to the dogs, and then in whispers. She tried so hard to justify her existence (that it should not be thought that

she was eating other people's bread for nothing), she was always seeking to be occupied, continuously sweeping bits from the floor and carefully moving the crockery in the cupboard. She was for ever trying to show how little money she spent and how little she cost them. Even when Elena Victorovna gave her money for shopping and asked her how much she needed she made every effort to say as little as possible, as if feeling that she was responsible for the money that was given her for the purchases. She usually ended up by not having enough and had to return for more. Then she was scolded by Elena Victorovna because she could not reckon up how much she wanted. She coughed as quietly as possible, every time with a frightened look, covering her mouth with her hand, and she went out into the corridor when she wanted to sneeze, which usually happened during the evening.

Kisliakof, in spite of his full consciousness of the helplessness of her position, in spite of all her delicacy, was inexplicably annoyed by her presence, was annoyed because, during dinner, on taking her first mouthful she invariably choked and began to cough.

All the time she tried to show how little she ate and how small the amount of sugar she put in her glass. When she first went to live with them Kisliakof had been touched with such delicacy and felt it his duty to press her to take more. He himself had added more sugar, as she only took half a spoonful and even then, after some thought, returned a little to the basin. But later he became accustomed to it and showed only irritation.

It seemed to him that he could see her for what she was. Everything she did was to show how little she really introduced upon them, with what self-abnegation she did everything to justify her existence, and her disinterestedness and humility began to appear to him as being full of cheap and petty calculations.

To be left alone with her when they were drinking tea was worse than anything. She tried to keep up a conversation, to show that she did not avoid him and was grateful for the food and the roof.

The conversations were such:

'It is a little warmer to-day than yesterday.'

'Yes, warmer.'

'Yesterday it was very cold.'

'Yes, it was much colder yesterday.'

'I wonder what the weather will be like to-morrow.'

Now when they were seated at the table the aunt stood for a long time fussing near the window, mending a stocking and holding it nearer to the light. This she did to show that she was not a glutton and did not rush to take her place at the table.

'Aunt, stop it. You will have time to do that,' said Elena Victorovna. Kisliakof said nothing, but felt annoyed.

Seating herself at the table, the aunt told how she could get nothing at the shops, and that only by standing in a queue from five o'clock had she had a chance of getting anything.

Kisliakof thought that she said this to show how she worked and how she tried to be useful to them.

'No, all the same I do not understand her,' said Elena Victorovna, without answering her aunt (it was unusual for anyone to pay attention to what she said). 'I do not understand her. Once the spiritual link is broken how can one ask for money?'

She returned to this probably because she could not get the divorce of Zvenigorodsky out of her mind.

'Women have lost all sense of dignity. In such circumstances she should drop everything, and covering the eyes and ears so as not to see or hear—escape, escape! Go and work as a laundress, or a washer up, but not ask anything from this blackguard.'

'Why "blackguard"?' asked Kisliakof of himself. 'He doesn't want to live with her, that's all.'

'Now you need have no fear of me,' said Elena Victorovna. 'If I should so much as feel that the spiritual bond between us had weakened I should go away at once, and that would be the end'—she emphasized these words—'neither reproaches nor demands for money would I make to you.'

Kisliakof experienced a feeling of gratitude and even tenderness towards his wife because she would leave him without a word and would impose no conditions whatever upon him; as though there lived in him, even in periods of full peace and harmony, a hidden hope of getting rid of her. He even stroked her hand.

When Elena Victorovna started about the Zvenigorodskys her aunt wanted to make a remark, but seeing that it turned to a question of their own relationship, she stopped on her first word and choked with the soup.

Kisliakof finished his soup and tried to seat himself more comfortably in the armchair, but met the straight silent gaze of the bulldog and turned with annoyance the other way.

He decided not to say a word to his wife about the agitation he was experiencing regarding the forthcoming 'workmanizing' of the museum personnel, as she would immediately expand this agitation to impossible limits, would say it was the end of all things and reduce him to such a state of anguish that he would be capable of hanging himself. He therefore limited himself to telling her about the impending arrival of Arkady Nesnamof.

'I have some very pleasant news. The best and only real friend

of my youth, Arkady Nesnamof, about whom I have told you so much, is coming to Moscow from Smolensk.'

Elena Victorovna accepted this information without the warmth of feeling with which Kisliakof imparted it. She was silent for some time and then asked:

'Is he coming alone?'

Kisliakof wanted to say, 'I am astonished that this recluse has married a young woman,' but some complicated feeling prevented him and he said that Arkady was coming alone.

Elena Victorovna said no more, but went on eating her dinner, and Kisliakof reflected regarding his silence on the subject of Nesnamof's wife how there was a continuous need to hide things from a being with whom one lives side by side and who every moment is talking about love, devotion, and of unity of spiritual interests. He could have expressed himself regarding the arrival of Arkady in such words: 'I am glad that a man is coming, who with his talks will revive my own spiritual self, which already seems dead in me, and help me to regain my lost faith in myself.'

But the first thing which he would have heard from Elena Victorovna if he made such a remark would have been the question:

'So you mean that I am nothing to you? With me you only lose your faith?'

'We will go to town immediately,' said Elena Victorovna. 'We must buy everything we need for to-night, and I want to choose some material to make a dress for the journey. Will you come with me?'

Although Kisliakof did not like to go out with her he said that he would go. He decided, in view of her imminent departure, to store the strength of his patience and not to get annoyed with her while they were out, not to quarrel, and not to return in open hostility over some trifle, as happened so often, but not for a moment did the thought of his chief anxiety leave him, and he was so preoccupied and absent-minded that his wife looked at him suspiciously and asked:

'What has happened to you to-day? Is there something wrong at your work?'

'No, nothing,' answered Kisliakof.

VI

ELENA VICTOROVNA WENT BEHIND THE SCREEN TO DRESS AND Kisiakof decided to use the opportunity to write a letter to Arkady. He wanted somehow to express with a hint that he awaited his new spiritual sister, as he called Arkady's wife to himself, and that he sent her his most tender brotherly greetings.

He looked round at the aunt. She was finishing her fruit syrup and milk with a small spoon. Then she began carefully, as though there was a patient in the room, to clear the table, talking in whispers to the dogs. Her eyelids trembled when he looked at her and she began to collect the crockery still more carefully. From this he concluded that she could see everything that he did although she appeared to pay no attention. Again her continuous presence in the room provoked in him an uncontrollable feeling of hatred towards her. He put a sheet of notepaper before him, but the quiet rattling of the crockery and the thought that his wife would soon be ready prevented him from concentrating.

He put the paper away and decided to send a wire when they were in town, then took up a book, but his attention, against his will, was fixed on the cautious movements by the aunt, and he waited until at last she should be finished, and the longer he waited the more irritable he became.

Elena Victorovna came out from behind the screen and began to put on her hat in front of the mirror hanging over his writing desk. Why must she hang the mirror just over his writing desk? How often when he sat doing some urgent work she would stand behind him trying something on, and was generally astonished when he stopped working and waited for her to finish.

To avoid having the feeling that she was behind his back he got up and went to fetch his hat from the door, where all his clothes were hanging on a nail. He stood by the door and Elena Victorovna continued putting on her hat. In spite of her stoutness she was so tightly laced that her chest was lifted up to her chin and her elbows stuck out from her side like samovar handles rather than the arms of a woman. Her face was always very flushed and her thin fair hair waved on her forehead in small curls. On her neck she wore a small black velvet bow. The aunt and the dogs accompanied them to the door.

Children who were racing in the corridor bumped into them. The dogs began to bark and the lower middle class woman peeped out of her door to see who was going out.

'Put your overcoat on,' said Elena Victorovna suddenly, look-

ing at her husband. 'Put your overcoat on, it isn't decent to go without it, only cobblers go out without coats.'

'But it is slit in the back,' said Kisiakof, 'which is still more indecent.'

'That's nothing nowadays, everybody goes about like that.'

So he had to go back and put on the hated overcoat with the stitching in the back.

They went out into the street. Whenever Elena Victorovna went out with her husband she assumed a certain aplomb and dignity, but Kisiakof, on the contrary, became nervous and woe-begone. He would be obsessed by some stupid thought (probably the result of his nervousness); he hated to walk along with such a small stout wife, or her hair was arranged without taste, or she was too dignified and alert. Perhaps it never entered her head that he could be interested in any other woman but her. At the same time she was absolutely certain of the infallibility of her taste, and when Kisiakof essayed some remark about the unsuitability of her vulgar velvet bow she only looked at him with an astonished glance, shrugged her shoulders, and at once walked on more quickly, showing her annoyance by going on as though alone.

For some reason girls in red kerchiefs laughed as they passed by. Kisiakof, thinking that they were laughing at him, blushed. Pretending that there was no room on the pavement, and so that no one could see that he was with Elena Victorovna and that she was his wife, he walked behind.

'Why do you lag behind? Take my arm,' she said, stopping.

Then they started. . . . They decided to board a tramcar. Elena Victorovna had not time to get on the first two tramcars, and they only succeeded in squeezing themselves on the end of the third, in doing which she got jammed in the door and could not reach the platform; some milk girls, carrying large empty milk cans, who were trying to get on, pushed her from behind. She became offended and instead of passing into the car turned round and began to abuse them. Then they all began to shriek at her.

'You fat thing! Blocked the whole way! We might have missed it through you!'

'You have no right to insult me.'

'What's that? Nobody insulted you, we spoke quite reasonably.'

'Puts on a hat and thinks no one should come near her. You ought to travel in a motorcar.'

The worst of it was that she could not restrain herself from answering these exclamations. Her hat went on one side and her face became crimson, and no matter how much Kisiakof tried to persuade her to avoid a row she did not listen to him, but became even more and more excited, pushing him away with her elbow.

They left the tramcar in silence: she crimson and infuriated, he biting his lip in sign of his annoyance with her.

'What cheapness and vulgarity—"You ought to travel in a motorcar"—like parrots they keep on saying the only thing they know. They haven't got the brains to say something original,' said Elena Victorovna in an attempt to make her husband speak and end this unpleasant silence.

They had to walk quite a long way, as Elena Victorovna insisted upon going to a shop where three days ago she had seen a pair of slippers which she had liked.

When they reached the shop they found a notice on the door saying that the shop was closed for stock-taking.

They went to another shop. There they found nothing suitable. Then to a third, near the telegraph office, where Elena Victorovna sat down to try on a pair which suited her. Kisliakof knew by experience that a good half-hour would elapse, during which a whole heap of boxes would be dragged down from the shelves by the assistant and piled up beside her before she found what she wanted, so he went out of the shop and went to the telegraph office. He was very pleased with the contents of the wire which he despatched: 'Impatiently awaiting you both.' Then after some thought he added the word 'love.' For whom this love was, was not specified, whether for Arkady only or for both of them. It might be understood either way, and she would be sure to feel that it had some connection with her, and also the word 'impatiently,' How far he was at this moment from the knowledge of how this meeting would end, and of the tragic first of October—Arkady's birthday!

'Do you want a receipt?' asked the girl behind the counter.

Engrossed in his thoughts of the forthcoming friendship, Kisliakof said mechanically:

'Yes please.'

'Where have you been?' asked Elena Victorovna, meeting him in the doorway of the shop, from which she was looking right and left in astonishment. It appeared that the shoes had fitted her immediately.

Kisliakof was compelled to say that he had been in a book shop: a wire would immediately have provoked the question of why such haste was necessary.

She again took his arm and they went from shop to shop like two lovers, he holding her hand and carrying the parcels, thinking that had he been able to throw Elena Victorovna over that month he would have been richer by a whole two hundred and fifty roubles, while now, owing to the unfortunate misunderstanding about the fifty, he had forgotten to put on one side the usual ten roubles for small unforeseen expenses.

'You will be a bit, just a wee bit, lonely without me?' asked Elena Victorovna, when they turned into the avenue, where there was more room for walking. She asked this in the thin voice with which she had talked when she was young and slim, and coquetishly drawled the words 'a wee bit'. By the tone he understood that she already knew what his answer would be, but he felt that to answer with words when these thoughts were flashing through his mind would be too much for his sense of honesty, so he just pressed her arm with his elbow.

'That's all very well, but your Arkady will come, and in a week you will have forgotten me and will perhaps even be pleased that I have gone away. Have you actually answered him?' asked Elena Victorovna.

'Whom?' asked Kisliakof, knowing full well what she was talking about.

'Arkady.'

'There is plenty of time.'

'My goodness. What a lot of money we have spent to-day, and all on me.'

Kisliakof was just thinking the same, as he looked at the five parcels which he was carrying, but he said:

'That's nothing. It's not every day that you spend so much on yourself.'

He said these comforting words with the idea that when she went away he would have the right to spend a little more, she had spent quite a lot, and not only had he not objected, but had even approved.

'But this will be the last time,' said Elena Victorovna, 'and when I have gone you will have to live more economically.'

Kisliakof nearly lost his inner balance on hearing these words: to the furthest depths of his heart he was revolted that she, this stout one, spent God knows how much, was always dressing up, was now going to her sister on the Volga for a change of air (she never has enough air), and all the time he must sit and work like a convict, and furthermore, be still more economical. But he restrained himself.

They entered a shop and bought provisions and wine. Then they boarded a tramcar and returned home. Kisliakof bumped into a well-dressed stranger wearing gloves and a stylish hat. The stranger reproved him testily.

Kisliakof, who was tired by shopping, shouted back:

'What's that? What a daisy we have here! Can't be pushed! Ought to travel in a motorcar! Wears a hat and gloves!'

At last they reached home in quite good temper; Elena Victorovna because she was walking with her husband, and he because he had walked with her for the last time and would now be rid of her for a whole month.

FIRST OF ALL THE ROOM HAD TO BE PREPARED FOR THE PARTY. THIS was a complicated procedure.

The room was square, and its windows faced on the street, overlooking those of the houses opposite. At first they had had four windows, but for a whole year they had been subjected to the envy of their neighbours, who, although none of them could have gained by the reduction of the accommodation of the Kisliakofs, were deprived of sleep and appetite by the consciousness that their neighbour had more space than they had. Ultimately one window and its relevant floor space was partitioned off and Pechonkina was lodged there. She was divided from the Kisliakofs by a wooden screen, which did not reach to the ceiling, and she could hear every word which was said in their room.

As the room was still large and had three windows, it continued to serve as an object of envy and talk amongst the inhabitants. The greater part of the space was occupied by books, which were kept in two large bookcases and anywhere else where shelves could be fixed. In a corner stood a special cupboard, filled with plans and drawings, all evidence of Kisliakof's former profession.

Elena Victorovna frowned on these books and said that she was unable to understand what use they were now, they only took up space which could ill be spared. In truth, the room combined in itself everything needed by man: dining-room, drawing-room, study, library, bedroom, kitchen, ante-room, and sometimes even shed for firewood.

In the middle of the room stood a table covered with oilcloth. Opposite it, near one of the walls, was a Turkish divan with cushions embroidered with thick cord. Round this cord and in the folds of the covers there were suspicious traces of white powder, a desperate remedy for bugs, which, as everybody affirmed, were bred in Pechonkina's room. Near the opposite wall was Elena Victorovna's bed, and further along, in a corner, was auntie's shake-down, always surrounded with screens.

Near the door was a complete store. As all the tenants were afraid to leave their clothes hanging in the corridor, they had to do the best they could in their own rooms, and here were overcoats, goloshes, and wet umbrellas standing half-open on the floor in order to let the rain drip off. To accommodate all this a space was partitioned off on the left of the door with a bookcase. When guests were being entertained they would fuss about for a good

quarter of an hour, sorting out their goloshes like prospectors searching for gold.

To the right of the door another mysterious space was divided off with the other bookcase, and if a guest, by mistake, went to this place for his goloshes instead of going to the left, he was immediately warned with frightened shouts that the goloshes were on the left. This holy of holies was even divided off with a linen hanging. It was the annex of the kitchen and refuse heap, where a table held the dirty crockery and the surplus provisions, and a scuttle was used as the receptacle for refuse. On the rare occasions when guests were being entertained the dishes were prepared in this corner. This was done in order that the curiosity of the neighbours who always tried to know how much and what sort of food others bought, should not be satisfied, so that when the various communal accounts had to be paid they could not turn round and say, 'They always argue when the accounts have to be paid, but they don't stint themselves with the food.'

So, to avoid such remarks, the provisions were prepared in the room.

When guests were being entertained, the room itself was given quite a different appearance.

First of all they carefully examined the divan and the walls to smear any traces of bugs with bug destroyer.

'Here are some small ones,' said the aunt, scratching under the cords of the cushions with her finger.

'Oh, the small ones are nothing, leave them alone or you will make spots and they will smell.'

A folded carpet was taken out of the divan and laid in the middle of the room. From behind the bookcase appeared two oil paintings, and from a dark lower drawer, porcelain, which was placed in an empty glass case.

All these articles were hidden away in fear of the arrival of the young finance inspectors, who usually appeared when it was raining, in overcoats with turned up collars, and, opening their notebooks, seated themselves at the table. Before the eyes of the frightened tenants, who tried to appear indifferent and unconcerned, as though their consciences were clear, they took various notes, glancing at the same time round the room, closing their inspection with a note as to the furniture—poor, fair, good, or rich, and the tenants were afraid to have even good furniture. The neighbours, including those of the educated class, were even worse than the inspectors, who only came once to make their notes, whereas they were always about, seeing everything, hearing everything.

To Hyppolit Kisliakof, as to a man imbued with the traditions of the educated class, all these preparations were distasteful, but

Elena Victorovna valued very highly the opportunity of 'receiving her guests as human beings', and he, obliged to obey, dragged out the carpet, hung the pictures, but in doing this was always very absent-minded and taciturn, and invariably managed to drop and break something. Then Elena Victorovna would throw up her hands and scream that he could never hold anything, that if she had known she would not have asked him to do anything, but would have done it all herself.

The aunt, standing for some reason on tiptoe and wearing a mysterious look as though they were breaking the law, would unfasten the parcels and put the provisions on plates, and everything she did seemed to Kisliakof to be done with ostentatious carefulness.

Elena Victorovna had not said that there must not be more than nine of them without reason; remaining from the old days she had a valuable service; three sets from it had been broken from time to time by Kisliakof (the memory of these occasions still remained with him), and only nine sets remained, and if only nine people sat down to table it had a rich appearance, but the arrival of each additional guest meant a catastrophe. Then the common plates, with the yellow cracks down the middle, had to be brought out, and the usual references to Soviet conditions, where, in addition to not having a decent service, there would very soon be nothing to eat, had to be made. Such references are all very well, but for the whole evening the host would be irritated by the additional guest.

'That's excellent, to-night at least aunt can sup with us decently,' said Elena Victorovna.

The eyelashes of the aunt trembled, she said nothing, but went on more diligently with her arrangement of the table. Each time she put a plate on the table she stepped back a few paces and surveyed it to see whether it was well placed. Kisliakof tried not to look at her, in order to avoid being annoyed. He went behind the curtain with Elena Victorovna, where they busied themselves with cutting up the sausages and ham. They had never been able to make up their minds to put a lamp behind this curtain, and consequently they had to work in the dark, as though developing photographs.

This was really a most dangerous process, and in the cramped space and darkness something was usually dropped and broken; it was difficult to prove who was to blame and there would immediately be quarrels and arguments.

'Why do you push into my side all the time?' said Elena Victorovna at last, having stood it for some time in the hope that the knocks would stop.

'How else can I carve?' asked Kisliakof.

'Leave it, I'll do it myself. You can open the wine bottles.'

Shrugging his shoulders, Kisliakof put down the knife and took the bottles. Gripping them between his knees and covering his lower lip with his upper one, he drew the corks carefully, so that he should make no noise. One pop would not be so bad, but if there were three or four, one after the other, Pechonkina, behind the partition, would assume at once they were arranging an orgy.

During such preparations all the other tenants became specially unnoticeable, and if they had to pass Kisliakof's door they lowered their eyes modestly, as if they did not know and were not interested to know what their neighbours were doing, but from this alone it was obvious that in spite of all the precautions, they did know, and that to-morrow they would all be able to say who was there and what they drank and ate.

Having opened the bottles and handed them to the aunt, who tried to grab everything going to the table, Kisliakof fixed to the chandelier a hundred candle power electric lamp, to give the party a more festive appearance.

At this moment, Elena Victorovna, her hands all herring, appeared from behind the curtain and exclaimed in fright: 'The window, the window!' in such a tone as one usually cries 'Fire!'

With a palpitating heart, Kisliakof turned round to the window opposite the table. They had forgotten to draw the curtains, and all their preparations for the feast, the table foremost, were exposed to the view of the windows of the house opposite.

With amazing quickness, like a mechanic who pulls a lever to let out a dangerous surplus of steam, Kisliakof tied together the fringes of the curtains.

Having lost their individual characteristics, the dogs now exhibited their general canine peculiarities: they sat quietly on one side, wagging their tails and lifting their ears at every movement of their master. Kisliakof tried to avoid the gaze of the bulldog, making it appear that he did not even see him, and when he stumbled over him he did not stop to push him away with his leg, but the bulldog moved quietly under the table, without growling, and with lowered head watched from under there.

When everything was ready: the table laid and the herrings cleaned, and clean serviettes put at each plate, the monotonous and anxious time of waiting commenced.

'They may be here in an hour,' said Elena Victorovna. Then she immediately added: 'There's something I have forgotten, we must have some flowers on the table. Go, please, there are some at the corner of the street, and in the meantime I will clean your jacket.'

Hyppolit Kisliakof took off his jacket and put on the one he wore in the house and quietly went.

On returning he saw something which he had expected least of all to see—Elena Victorovna was seated on the divan, on her knees she held the jacket and a brush, and in her hands was the receipt for the telegram, bearing the name of the place of delivery—Smolensk. . . . And he had told her that he had not yet replied to Arkady.

He grasped the situation at once.

Holding the receipt in her hands, with eyes half closed, Elena Victorovna was gazing fixed before her. She did not move when he entered.

The aunt was already behind the screen, where she always went in tense moments. It meant that she already knew the substance of what was wrong.

'Why did you tell me a lie?' said Elena Victorovna, holding out the receipt, which she held tightly in her hand. 'You told me that you hadn't replied to your friend, and what is this?'

In such circumstances the one who is caught can take two attitudes: either a submissive guilty appearance, or quickly invent some innocent motive to conceal the discovery, acting with bravado and saying that he will not submit to such supervision, that people who poke their noses into his pockets can go to the devil.

In the present case the last was the most suitable attitude to take up, as it was her own namesday and her own celebration, and it was she who would suffer more if he sat like a bear the whole evening and shamed her before the guests.

At that moment there were three rings, which meant their guests had arrived. With a quickness which could never have been expected of her Elena Victorovna jumped up, throwing the jacket from her knees to the floor, probably trying to show by this her feelings towards Kisiakof. Her face had already assumed the affable expression of a hostess towards her guests, on her way she had time to powder her nose quickly and glance into the mirror.

In a moment they were both in the corridor, the aunt remaining hidden behind the screen, so that it should not be thought that she wished to push herself forward and remain near the table, although a place had been arranged for her.

The guests entered with lively greetings and exclamations. Host and hostess stood side by side, trying at the same time not to touch each other with their elbows, and with joyful voices asked the guests to come in.

But by the number of voices the fine ear of Elena Victorovna suddenly sensed something wrong, and one quick glance which she cast in the half light of the corridor on the arrivals made her heart jump.

They had expected Galahof, the tall Gusev, and Andrey Ignatich, each with his wife, but according to her quick and agitated count eight people at that moment were entering the corridor.

It proved that they had to thank Gusev for this good service. He was always soul of good company and invariably invited some surprise or amusing situation which he thought would assist in uplifting the general atmosphere. It appeared that on the way to Kisliakof's house they had met two other colleagues from the museum. Both were short and uninteresting, one, bald-headed and short-sighted, worked somewhere in the archives of the museum, the other had such a crop of hair that the dogs in the corridor went quite mad at seeing him. The bulldog growled and Jerry barked as he only did when he saw the statistician.

'I hope you don't mind my bringing these two small ones?' asked Gusev, pushing the 'small ones' in front of him.

Elena Victorovna did her best to assume a hospitable smile (even Kisliakof was surprised by its unnaturalness), and both begged them to come in, saying 'the more the merrier.' What could be done about it, as they were already on the spot; it was not possible to tell them to go back to where they came from.

'Can we take our things off?'

'No, no; they will be stolen if you leave them here. Please come in here.'

Even Kisliakof's spirits had fallen on seeing the number of their guests. He became dull and absent-minded and stepped on their feet as they entered the room. They all went in, in their midst the two hateful little figures, who, let it be said, did not utter a word, but with extraordinary seriousness in some way dragged down the hands of their hosts as they greeted them.

'No, no; to the left,' said Elena Victorovna, in alarm, as Gusev, probably thinking to create a diversion, made a move to draw the curtain.

They began to take off their things in the already overcrowded corner, and for some time there could be heard a quiet fumbling and frightened apologies.

Kisliakof, concentrated and immovable, stood aside and unconcernedly watched the guests fussing about like fish in a small jar.

'Can't you help?' screamed Elena Victorovna at last, and her eyes flashed with a new anger (in addition to that for the business of the receipt).

Kisliakof mechanically, as though he had no time to realize what he did, rushed into the small receptacle, which in consequence became still more crowded.

'Now you are not really very angry with us for bringing these

two dear people?' asked Gusev, moving out into the free space and wiping his moustache with his handkerchief.

'How can you, how can you, it's splendid,' said Elena Victorovna, recovering herself immediately, though to both her and Kisiakof came a sad thought. It would be necessary, bringing out the additional cracked plates, to refer to Soviet conditions, and move the chairs closer, and there could be no thought of the aunt sitting at the table.

VIII

GUESTS WERE INVITED, NOT TO MEET PEOPLE OF THEIR OWN CLASS, thinking and feeling in the same way, but simply because it was not considered polite to go for a long time without inviting friends.

Although such friends were people whom they knew well, there was no inner bond between them. Political conversations were not very stimulating and were in the main confined to the very narrow limits of the lack of market produce, especially white flour, and any guest who started to talk on such a subject would subject his hearers to an uncertain scrutiny and would also throw a quick glance at the walls, estimating how sound-proof they might be.

Even intimate colleagues, knowing each other well, tried not to talk too much, and expressed their sympathy and mutual interest in the less dangerous way of inquiring about each other's health and plans for the winter season. They had all the unexpressed but definite feeling against that which they were undergoing, and here agreement was general, but was limited by the aforementioned causes to the narrow limits of lack of products and flour, but not one of them had a precise feeling of 'What they all stood for, and what was the political platform which united them.'

Because of this the dullest and hardest time for host and hostess started when the first guests began to arrive. They must be entertained somehow until the others came, when conversation could be avoided by immediately taking their seats at the table. This was also the most disagreeable time for the guests, who were all afraid to come too early lest they might be obliged to start dull talks alone with their hosts and wait indefinitely for the meal to commence.

A guest arriving first would immediately, on entering the empty room, glance round and exclaim in a confused and frightened tone:

'What is this? It looks as though I am first here.'

Then the host would begin to calm him, praising him for his punctuality and grumbling about those who were late, but the guest would remain confused, fearing that his host might be thinking:

'He was so delighted to be invited that he rushed here before any of the others.'

So any guest invited singly and not with a party tried to delay his arrival until the others would certainly be there, which usually meant that if invited for eight o'clock he came at nine, and if for ten he came at midnight.

On this occasion everything went well. All the guests arrived together and there was no necessity to offer tea to each one separately and to tremble at every ring, but for the Kisliakofs everything was spoiled by the arrival of the two uninvited guests.

Hyppolit, having lost all his good spirits owing to the misunderstanding with his wife and the arrival of these two, was in a condition of depressed absent-mindedness. One moment he was disturbed by the thought that there would not be enough to share out amongst them all, the next he was trying to invent some innocent explanation of why he had hidden the receipt from his wife. Why had he taken a receipt? These thoughts troubled him so much that he was unable to start conversing with the guests, and Elena Victorovna had to work alone.

He only noticed the presence among the guests of a young lady, the wife of the taciturn Galahof. She was a somewhat buxom brunette, with fashionably cropped hair and a lively doll-like face, with eyes which blinked continuously, as though she was not quite awakened.

Kisliakof decided that to annoy his wife he would sit near this lady.

They next occupied themselves with the dogs. It appeared that they all had dogs at home, and a general, and to a certain extent animated, conversation commenced.

'In times in which we live,' said Elena Victorovna (Kisliakof listened), 'one can only rely on dogs. Take my Tom for example, he is my most certain protection.'

The dogs were standing in the middle of the room, blinking confusedly and wagging their tails, as they felt that they were being talked about. When his name was mentioned, Tom slightly raised his head and wagged his tail more vigorously.

'I will give you an example. Tom will not allow anyone to hurt me, I have only to give the signal.'

They made the experiment. Kisliakof seized his wife by the hand; Elena Victorovna shrieked:

'Tom, they are hurting me . . . ' and the bulldog, growling, rushed with fury at Kisliakof, so that he became really frightened and pale, but he made it appear that this was just what one expected from the dogs. From this moment he hated the bulldog still more, as it appeared that this rubbishy thing—a dog—did not consider it necessary to see in him his master, and he was obliged in front of his guests to make the whole thing appear as a joke.

As the room was completely filled with the extended table and all the chairs they had, tall ones and low ones with different backs, the guests were obliged to stand about in awkward positions and make it appear that they felt very merry and were in no hurry

to seat themselves at the table—did not in fact pay any attention to it.

Elena Victorovna struggled to add life to the conversation; with exaggerated animation she laughed at some sentence; with exaggerated astonishment she raised her painted eyebrows as though she was being told some incredible news; but the more animated she became the more nervous and downcast became Kisliakof, as he hated his wife for this pretence and for her painted eyebrows.

'Now I think we can seat ourselves,' said Elena Victorovna at last, seeing that she was losing her strength. 'Andrey Ignatieh, please here. Do all sit down.'

Kisliakof was so taken up with the thought that he must at all costs sit next to the doll-like brunette, and his haste to occupy the seat next to her was so obvious that all the others looked at him in astonishment. . . . He was first at the table, and was seated while all the other guests were still confusedly grasping the backs of chairs, undecided where to sit.

Perhaps the guests thought: 'Is he as hungry as all that?'

At last they were all seated. In front of the table sat the hostess, with her carefully curled hair lying on her forehead, her painted eyebrows, and with elbows thrust out; near her, the noble figure of Andrey Ignatieh, with his splendid beard, grey suit and white waistcoat. Opposite was Kisliakof, on the seat he had seized near the doll-like brunette. The other guests seated themselves on either side along the table.

And the aunt continued to sit behind the screen, because she had lost the opportunity of coming out when the guests arrived and to appear now would have been awkward, and in any case there was no place for her to sit.

The two uninvited guests got low chairs and only their heads appeared above the table; the one bald, the other very dishevelled. The bulldog seated himself not far from the latter and, without moving, kept his eye first on him and then on his mistress, waiting probably for a signal.

As a rule Hyppolit Kisliakof did not drink, but on this occasion he decided that he would. For this he had three reasons; first, because the threat to make the museum staff working class was on his mind and he wanted to forget it; then the disagreeable impression of his wife finding the receipt for the telegram had to be overcome; and thirdly, in order to be more bold with his neighbour.

Gusev was leaning half-way over the table and pouring out into the lady's glass, laughing so loudly that the neighbours might have thought that the feast had already commenced. This distracted Kisliakof, who thought that the lower middle class woman must certainly be holding her breath and listening to everything.

Probably this was the reason that all was so quiet behind the partition.

All the ladies drank vodka; and even the doll-like brunette, when Kisliakof inquiringly held the decanter over her glass, smiled like a fellow conspirator and nodded her acquiescence.

'I think we shall understand each other,' whispered Kisliakof, and in an intimate way she inclined her head towards him to hear what he had to say, then looked at him and smiled, as though to say that she was in complete agreement.

Kisliakof immediately moved his leg under the table so that it should just touch the dress of his neighbour and enable him, on such occasions when he had to reach for food, to press closely to her. In such a position it could not be known whether he was touching her or not.

'So, comrades,' said Gusev, raising his glass gallantly and looking round the table with half a bow.

They all raised their glasses gaily and looked at each other in expectation of a toast.

'My dear hosts, allow me to thank you for having brought us together so that for a few hours we can forget our little troubles and all that is troublesome and depressing. You do not live very elegantly, probably in the same way as everyone else who is present here'—(he again, with a jocular bow, looked round the company)—'in a Noah's ark. I would like to wish you——'

'Speak a little quieter,' said Kisliakof, with a blush. 'Everything can be heard behind the partition.'

Gusev glanced at the wall in fright, choked and became silent.

'What an awkward throat; he roars so that the whole flat can hear him,' thought Kisliakof, clinking glasses with his neighbour and giving her a glance which was intended to say that she was a wonderful woman.

When they began to reach for food, the sombre Galahof complimented the hostess on the fact that she had such a lot of white bread, and of such good quality. Elena Victorovna replied that it was because the aunt had gone to-day and stood in a queue from five o'clock that they had such white bread.

The conversation turned at once, with great animation, but in already lowered tones, to the subject of provisions, then touched on the position of the peasants, then, lowering their voices to the merest whisper, they talked about the progressive building programme, and at the same time about the 'crucifixion of the intelligentsia', but they spoke of this in such low voices that they had to bend over the table in order to hear each other; an observer might have thought they were conducting a spiritualistic séance. At the same time Kisliakof was trying to give the men to understand, by

means of signs, that they must not speak about the position at the museum.

'How can one be enthusiastic and work creatively,' said Andrey Ignatich in a whisper, 'when the powers that be only pay attention to the workmen and treat us as though we do not exist. They only force us to work with no hope for the future, but though they force us to work they cannot force us to create.'

Kisliakof continued to fill the glass of his neighbour, and she blushed and blinked her half-awakened eyes always more and more charmingly. His leg was already pressing quite closely to hers under the table, and she was allowing it. He appeared to be engrossed in the conversation, his chin was almost resting on the table, and at the same time he was fully concentrated on the unexpected romance with the doll-like brunette.

To prove his interest in the general topic he said, referring to the thought by Andrey Ignatich, that one could not be forced to create:

'There is an old English saying: "An ass can be brought to the water but cannot be compelled to drink. . . ."'

He blushed immediately afterwards and, as if frightened, became silent, because Gusev, who was seated near him, kicked him as he reached for the decanter. Had he done this by accident or in a friendly way, advising him not to say too much before some people? It was hard to tell.

'So you have the result?' said Andrey Ignatich, looking with astonishment at his suddenly silent host, 'and the result is that we all pretend to be doing something, while actually we are doing nothing, although we are occupied from morning until night. We all think in this way—"I will only do as much as will keep me out of prison." This shows the indifference of the predominating majority of the members of the educated class to everything.'

To speak more quietly, he leaned so low over the table that the end of his beard touched the gravy of the grayfish on his plate. Elena Victorovna saw this, but did not know how to tell him not to bend so low.

'The dreadful thing is the complete moral decline,' said she, and at the last word she removed Andrey Ignatich's beard from his plate. 'Somehow one gets terrified and asks one's self what has become of the people who such a short time ago were full of dignity, worth and sense of honour? There is nothing of it left now; everyone thinks only of himself and how to save his own skin.'

'That's true, quite true,' sounded several voices.

Encouraged by the general agreement with her words, Elena Victorovna continued:

'Does anything remain of the past idealism, even a shadow of the old chivalry and the fortitude with which people proclaimed

their beliefs, believed in their ideals and would not give them up for anything? The men especially,' continued Elena Victorovna excitedly, pushing away the glasses in front of her, 'now when the powers——'

Suddenly, in the corner of the room, some one chokingly stifled a sneeze. They all trembled and looked at each other.

This was the aunt, who, unable to restrain her usual evening failing, had sneezed, pressing her nose and mouth in a cushion so that she should not be heard; or perhaps she wished to go out.

Elena Victorovna, who for some time had forgotten her existence, immediately explained to the guests:

'That was my aunt, she was not well and stayed in bed.'

The uninvited guests had not said a word throughout the whole evening, and had gone on devouring the food as though their sole purpose was to fill up. When Elena Victorovna praised their appetites as an example to the other guests and half ironically offered them another helping of turkey, they silently (their mouths being full) passed up their plates and continued their attack on the viands.

'The women also are the same,' said Gusev for some reason tittering. 'I knew one respectable young woman who came from a very good family and could speak three languages. Her husband deserted her, leaving her pregnant. Invited by one of her kind friends, she went with him to the theatre, and then, when the child was born, charged this friend at the court with having taken advantage of her on the way to the theatre, and demanded support from him.'

'Yes, it is terrible,' said several voices.

Kisliakof, with a side glance at his neighbour, carefully and mechanically drew his leg away from hers.

Having already drunk several glasses of vodka in spite of the displeased glances of her gloomy, monkish husband, she was looking about with a wandering eye, smiling on the table before her, which began to look like two, and busied herself examining her own feelings.

'I have already told my husband,' said Elena Victorovna, 'that if he deserts me I shall go away from him, retaining my full womanly dignity. He will not hear a word of reproach from me. I will go hungry, earning my crust of bread by sewing, but from him I will not take a penny, nor one stick of furniture.'

'We will come to you at once and place orders,' said all the ladies, and they leaned over and clinked glasses with her.

By the time the wine cup was served the conversation had become general, they were all talking together, laughing, spilling the wine on the tablecloth and forcing the ladies to drink.

Kisliakof experienced an extraordinary gaiety and laughed at

his own and other people's words, the depressing feeling of irritation against his wife and all his discomforts had passed. For some reason he frequently went over to the writing desk and looked at himself in the mirror. His well-greased hair was disarranged and his eyes wandered. This also gave him a feeling of gaiety. It was the first time he had been in such a state of intoxication.

His neighbour, who had drunk too much, was feeling unwell. Elena Victorovna took her to the bathroom and all the men went in the same direction. Someone suggested that mustard was a good thing in such cases. As all their heads were somewhat muddled and their hands could not be controlled, the sufferer was smeared with mustard. Then they were distracted by something else and moved away in a crowd down the corridor and back into the room. Kisliakof went with them, but returned to the bathroom.

The doll-like lady, abandoned by everybody, stood leaning against the wall, with one of her curls sticking up and her face covered with mustard. Kisliakof took her hand; she did not respond in any way. Her eyes were closed. Then, gazing towards the door with weakening eyes, he embraced and kissed her, pressing her close to himself, thinking meanwhile that in such a condition she would remember nothing in the morning.

Then he propped her up as carefully as possible in the corner and also went away.

He went along the corridor muttering to himself:

'My God! To what an extent we have fallen . . . Let it be so . . . isn't it all the same?'

He could not understand why the end of his nose tickled.

The guests did not leave until dawn, when the wine was finished.

When they had gone Kisliakof went over to his wife and said:

'I did not tell you about the telegram because you would certainly have said, "Why such a hurry and why spend so much money on a telegram when you can do it by letter?"'

'You stupid thing, I was beginning to think that some deception had crept into our life,' said Elena Victorovna.

Only then did she remember that her aunt, instead of having supper, had remained motionless behind the screen all the time.

IX

WHEN KISLIAKOF AWOKE THE NEXT MORNING, HE KNEW THAT ALL the uplifted feeling of the night had disappeared and in its place was a stronger sense of trouble ahead. There was nothing mystical about this premonition; it was connected solely with the meeting which was to be held in the museum that day.

The morning was grey and dull; his eyes blinked disagreeably, and from time to time his heart seemed to drop and miss a beat.

When he went to the bathroom and took his place as third in the queue, he heard a fragment of conversation from the kitchen, it was the wife of the locksmith who was speaking:

‘. . . it would be a good thing to know by what means? . . .’

‘One doesn’t ask by what means nowadays,’ answered the voice of the lower middle class woman.

Kisliakof understood that they were talking about yesterday’s celebration, and his heart lost two more beats. He suddenly experienced a strong desire to express his sense of wrong. He sat at his bureau and wrote a letter to Arkady:

‘I am immeasurably pleased that you are coming. In these hard, hopeless times, one is in need, more than at any other time, of a friend, a man to whom one can express all that lies on the heart like a dead weight and cannot be expressed. Your words about faith touched me in a most tender spot. Therein lies my tragedy. I dropped my work, and the new activity provides no stimulus for creating. With it one can only exist, but without faith one cannot live. I try with all my strength to be able to believe, but, at the same time, reflect that perhaps this faith I ask is not faith but treachery. Again the two roads, and at the end—a void. Any observer could see that I am a splendid workman, but the work which I am doing is my mess of pottage. I await you with impatience.’

If only Kisliakof could have known that six weeks later, after the tragedy of the first of October, this letter would be in the hands of the public prosecutor, he would certainly not have written it.

As he went along the street, in the rain, life seemed so terribly disgusting that he had no wish to look at anything.

There goes a tramcar, filled with people soaked with the rain, and with the rain flowing from the roof down one side. A covered car flies past, splashing the mud as it jumps over uneven places. The trees in the avenue, which glistened yesterday in the bright August sunshine, now droop sadly and drip on the sodden sand of the road.

Near a gateway he saw a wretched looking dog, shivering in the wet, an incarnation of the cruelty and implacability of life. And yet it went on living. Why?

To Kisiakof in this frame of mind it seemed that it would be a wonderful blessing to be able to run away from people, to see nobody and to live with one's inner world. For a moment he even found comfort in the thought that Elena Victorovna would not know if he disappeared in such a way. Then, in all probability, the love that had been would be awakened within her. Yes, that had been . . . It suddenly struck him that she had made no remark about the doll-like lady. Perhaps she sensed that he was standing on the brink, that only because of his great despair and not for any trifling fickleness was he acting as he did. All the same it would be good not to see her, to see nobody, to be quite alone with only the company of his own heart. Then, perhaps, the cure would come.

Seeing the number of the tramcar which he was accustomed to seeing stop outside the museum, he remembered the meeting that was to be held and that his employment at that establishment might end . . . and what then?

X

FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE REVOLUTION ALL POSSIBLE KINDS of work in the newly-born republic could be divided into three categories.

To every peacefully minded intelligent surely the most unacceptable was that of bearing arms to protect the revolution, or of joining the popular masses and combating, by means of propaganda, the antagonistic element at home.

The second category, perhaps more acceptable, was the passive promotion of the revolution, when one had merely to execute (and one could not avoid executing) the measures promoted by the powers for the strengthening of the new regime. This was purely mechanical and voluntary, and did not, therefore, clash with the moral code of the man of the educated class. Such was the work in most of the Soviet technical, communal and banking establishments, and even, it might be said with truth, except for some little exceptions, in the tax department. The man simply served because the revolution found him on the spot, he himself coerced nobody, deprived no one of his belongings or household goods, did not imprison or call by word or example to the support of the revolution.

Then there was also work of the first category, in every respect of the first! It was that which had not the slightest connection with the revolution, which assisted it neither directly nor indirectly, and in some cases even went against it, and, at the same time, was not only legal but was supported and protected by the revolutionary authorities.

Such was the work in establishments protecting monuments of art and antiquity.

The people working in such establishments could pride themselves on the fact that they had not in the slightest degree departed from their principles as representatives of the intelligentsia, nor sullied the glories of that past which had given so many martyrs for the ideal of human equality, for the principle of justice and for the absolute negation of violence. Working in these establishments, they could feel that in no way had they turned their hands to deeds of violence. For this reason, naturally, they looked down on those who had condoned, even indirectly, the violence used by the authorities. Not only had they not used force to achieve the revolution, but they even worked to preserve that which the revolution was destroying.

Quite naturally the people who were attracted to this work

were chiefly those who cherished antiquity for its own sake. The proletariat, less than any, felt sympathy towards relics. They could not appreciate them, but being told that relics had the right to be preserved, they at first allowed the people who liked and understood these matters to occupy themselves with them. They had enough to do in the spheres of national work and the life which they understood.

The result of this was that practically all other establishments, from the early years of the revolution were democratized 'from the street,' servants were abolished, and the people entered the buildings in dirty boots and wet overcoats, threw cigarette ends on the floors and entirely upset the solemn and formal quietness which characterized crown establishments before the revolution. Only buildings connected with the housing of art and antiquity remained immune from the proletarian invasion.

In the huge museum where Kisliakof worked, the old church-like quietness and cleanliness remained, the carpets at the entrance were still there, there was still the imposing, important looking porter Sergey Ivanovitch, respectful to those in high positions and strict with those in low. The strict correctness of personal address and the attention of those in the lower positions to higher officials have remained unchanged. Sergey Ivanovitch would not allow any employee to hang up his own overcoat or to pick up from the floor a dropped umbrella or handkerchief, he was like an old-fashioned nurse and looked upon all the employees who were of good birth as his particular charges, who had to be looked after, as they did not know how to dress themselves properly, nor would it have been proper for him to stand and look on while they did things for themselves.

At first the director had been one of the aristocrats—a charming, well-educated man, formerly an important landowner. He was an expert antiquarian. His relations towards his staff were gentlemanly and based on absolute confidence. He knew also how to act the gentleman, and when they approached his enormous, heavily-carpeted study, the employees even experienced a sort of shyness, though to many of them this was agreeable and reminiscent of the old days.

The revolution even appealed to many of those who worked here. They had already become accustomed to, and entered into, the Soviet system, established friendly relations with higher representatives of the authorities, by whom they were treated with respect for their old merits and as people who had extended their hand to the new regime. They all considered themselves as citizens with full rights, and although it was sometimes distasteful to them that in their appeals the authorities addressed themselves only to the workmen and somehow ignored them, they

looked on this as an indispensable convention of the new regime. In reality, the Soviet representatives were more intimate with them than with workmen, and in spite of any sort of revolution it seemed that the people of the educated class were the 'salt of the earth', people of first-class brains and knowledge, who would always occupy the highest posts.

The central museum was an islet which had not been overwhelmed with the waves of reality, and the authorities dwelt there in peace with all other classes, so that the members of the educated class could retain the consciousness of their class and at the same time feel that they were progressive and possessed a wide outlook, having been among the first to accept the new regime.

Then alarming symptoms began to make themselves manifest; the proletariat began to advance along the whole front and to filter into establishments which they previously had not entered. The newspapers, too, began to refer to the museums as havens for people who had nothing in common with the revolution. The re-staffing of the museums with representatives of the workers showed that there was something in the Press notices, which maintained that the methods of work in these places were quite out of touch with present day requirements, because the employees had fenced themselves in from the outside world and at best tried only to gather as many exhibits as possible, exhibits which really interested nobody, making the place rather an antediluvian store house of curiosities than a revolutionary museum.

The old director was discharged and a new one—Comrade Polukhin—appointed. He was a member of the working class, who had passed through the workers' secondary school and entered the university. With the director a number of people who had too great a class bias were also discharged. Later there began a systematic clearing up and all the most intellectual and cultured people—the 'salt of the earth'—were discharged. The employees then began to feel that the waves had come right up to the islet and threatened to dampen all the 'salt'.

A small cell was formed in the museum, a local committee, composed almost exclusively of technical employees, was formed, meetings were held at which the members of the educated class attended at first with shrugging shoulders and ironical sneers, in anticipation of speeches from some kind of new and unknown people.

Although the main body of the employees of the educated class felt that they were still numerically powerful, and in spite of the hall porter and the carpets on the stairs, and the mutual

correctness of approach which still remained, the new atmosphere which filled the place made itself strongly felt.

Exercise shirts began to appear in place of formal suits, sabots on bare feet, familiar slappings on the back and expressions which exasperated respectable ladies like Marya Pavlovna, such as 'He expired like a sausage' and 'Don't buzz'.

The low-born members of the staff were indifferent to this, but employees like Marya Pavlovna really suffered.

'What are they coming to? I can't understand a word!' she would usually say in despair, folding her hands on her bosom and looking at her colleagues with an astonishment which bordered on terror.

The technical employees, industrious and respectful, had previously known how to keep their place, and the colleagues had considered themselves as kind masters, served by faithful, attentive and devoted servants, and because of this the technical employees themselves had in most cases been gentle, polite and kind: 'Masha, my friend, do please bring some tea,' or, 'Ivan Ivanovitch, my dear, do take away these books.' But, sensing the change, the technical employees themselves had quite changed, and threatened to become masters. They generally passed the colleagues with lowered heads, so as not to meet their eyes and bow to them, and the colleagues, too, tried to lower their eyes, as if afraid that the technical employees would pass them looking them straight in the face and not bow, which would be both awkward and unpleasant. It seemed difficult for them to say the first word of greeting.

Previously the permit for books to be taken from the library had been issued by one of the colleagues; a special man in a blue apron and high boots now had this task, and it could not be said whether he was placed there for the purpose of signing permits or in order to watch whether the educated employees paid proper attention to their duties. All the colleagues began to experience disagreeable feelings. Sometimes, deep in thought about something or other, their gaze would wander and they would suddenly light upon the man in the blue apron, and then they would feel that they had been caught idling and that this would be noted against them, or in such moments, noticing the glance of the man in the blue apron, they would change their expression as though their whole thoughts were on the work.

They, who so recently had been men who appreciated their own dignity, suddenly became timid, timid to such an extent as to provoke astonishment among their colleagues, in spite of the fact that they too were timid (though one does not notice it so much in one's self).

The second stage of the revolution, the class war, seemed to

many more terrifying than all the tempests and storms of the first; at that time they had been able to jump to one side, to wait until things quietened more or less, and then to be among the first to hold out their hands to the new regime.

They could all remember with what doubtful feelings they had anticipated the appearance of the new director, which seemed to most of them to be the first definite sign of approaching disaster—of their gradual displacement by the uprising proletariat. They were all astonished by his tall boots and blue blouse, not being accustomed to such attire in their establishment, much less in the director's study.

Everybody was especially struck by his glass eye, which was stern and unblinking, like that of a corpse. It seemed somehow to neutralize the kind expression of the living eye.

On his first appearance Polukhin entered the library with abrupt, straight movements. He stood there and looked not so much at the faces as somehow over them, as if counting how many heads were before him (the employees had been in a dilemma as to whether to stand up or go on with their work). Then the director had greeted the nearest of the colleagues, and awkwardly, as if with indecision, extended his hand to him. After this he went round all the halls with Gusev, listening to his explanations. For some reason he stood for a long time before a bed and two helmets of Nicholas I. What attracted his attention to these cannot be said. Then he glanced round as though looking for something else.

'Relics,' said he abruptly, looking at Gusev.

'Yes,' said he, not knowing whether to take a respectful or an ironical tone.

On returning to his colleagues, Gusev told them that the new director had surprised him: why had he paid such special attention to the bed and helmets of Nicholas I?

During the inspection of the halls, the colleagues had exchanged glances for some time. This they continued to do later at each appearance and every word of the new director, though it seemed that he did not notice it. But they glanced at each other in quite a different way when he spoke of democratizing the staff.

The immediate cause of this menace to their security was, if they only knew it, the persistent ignoring of the representatives of the Young Communist Movement. It was that which brought Polukhin on to the platform at a meeting called to consider the boycott of the working class element by the intelligentsia.

XI

IN THAT DOWNCAST STATE IN WHICH A BOY GOES TO AN EXAMINATION, Kisliakof ascended the wide staircase of the museum, hoping only that he might not meet the new director, to whom he felt in the same relationship as to a headmaster. He did not think that he had done anything wrong, but on meeting him felt that he must have some fault, and in spite of the fact that he had already had several talks with Polukhin.

He reached the room safely, kissed the hand of Marya Pavlovna with a feeling of pleasure and relief, increased by the French sentence which she addressed to him as to a 'man of social standing,' and he greeted with a special expression of friendliness those who had been his guests the night before. Then he went into the reference room, continuing in a state of funk.

Then he collided with Polukhin, who was standing in the Nicholas I hall, looking round with concentration, as though he was thinking over some plan which was in his mind. Kisliakof's heart throbbed at the unexpectedness of this meeting; he felt that it would be impossible to pass without speaking, so he stopped and asked:

'What are you examining so closely, Andrey Zaharovitch?'

'Good day, Comrade Kisliakof. . . . What am I examining? Ah, a thought just came to me, but it cannot be developed immediately. I will tell you about it when I have thought it over. It is a very profound thought, to my mind, and I think it will perhaps appeal to you, but to your colleagues, I doubt. . . .'

He turned his face towards Hyppolit Kisliakof, and though his living eye was merry and good humoured, the artificial one was deadly and severe.

This sentence, by which Polukhin for some reason distinguished Kisliakof from the remainder of his colleagues, seemed suddenly to impart to him the breath of life.

Kisliakof was very curious to know what thought had come to his chief, and why it should appeal to him and not to his colleagues, but some intuitive feeling, some tact of which he himself was not conscious, warned him not to ask; his smile gave Polukhin to understand that his supposition regarding his colleagues was perhaps near the mark, but he did not go on to ask for details.

At all his meetings with Polukhin, despite the will and mental attitude, he seemed to have a flair of sensing what he ought or

ought not to say. Such a flair was perhaps characteristic of courtiers under the old regime.

The first time it happened was when Polukhin, feeling himself a stranger, alone in this place, exchanged a few words with Kisliakof, expressing a thought in a simple and comradelike way which the old director would never have done, as he could not allow himself to forget that he was—the director.

Kisliakof, who was hostile towards Polukhin as towards a man whose purpose was to dismiss him, relented at this unexpectedness of address and answered sympathetically. From that time on Polukhin began to think of Kisliakof as of one who shared his thought and point of view, and he talked to him with the same freedom as he used with the scouts who worked in the museum.

Having become more at home, he could certainly have accommodated himself to others in the museum in the same way, and could still have dismissed them without scruple when the time came. But Polukhin had clearly picked out Kisliakof as an exception to the rest. Kisliakof felt like a scholar who has unexpectedly been awarded first prize. Polukhin, following the habit of the party, called him—Comrade Kisliakof—and not Hyppolit Kisliakof, which sounded offensive to a good Communist, and Kisliakof was not abashed by this, but instead felt gratitude for it. This gratitude would probably, in the old days, have been called 'dogs' happiness', or 'tail wagging'. The code of the intelligentsia thus explained good relations to 'the powers that be', and certainly Hyppolit Kisliakof's feelings at the time did not deserve a more delicate classification by his conscience.

With a strong effort of will, he stopped the process of self-examination which started in his brain.

'It is difficult to work without one's own people,' said Polukhin, continuing to stand and gaze round the hall. 'And furthermore, at the start I understand nothing. . . . But, you see, I noticed how they glanced at me, thinking: "Here comes a peasant into these fine rooms, like a pig into a silk merchant's shop." Nor are they very kind to our fellows, they try by all the means in their power to push them out. Still, we shall see about that. . . . I am calling a meeting to-day; you will come, Comrade Kisliakof?'

'Certainly, certainly!' answered Kisliakof, for some reason with frightened haste, and he noted mentally that he, a person of the educated class, despising all authority, at this moment hurried, did his best, like a miserable clerk before a general.

'I can see that the intelligentsia set the tone here,' continued Polukhin. 'They will have to be sorted out a bit. I shall put the question to them to-day—who is master here, the proletariat or they?'

How did it happen that Polukhin chose Kisliakof as his con-

fidant and singled him out from all his colleagues. Was it whim, or was there something in Kisliakof of which he was not himself aware, which really distinguished him as a man who could get closer to the proletariat than most of the other educated employees. He did not know, but to him it was an unexpected ray of hope across the gloom of despair in which he had found himself.

To give some sort of answer to Polukhin, Kisliakof tried in a way to excuse his colleagues:

'Certainly it is difficult for them to understand the spirit of the times, and it seems to them that every measure which is forced on them is leading only to something worse. That's absolutely characteristic of the intelligentsia; but if you put a little pressure on them they give way.'

'Quite right, and I shall put pressure on, and those to whom it is not acceptable can clear out while there is yet time.'

Somebody walked along the corridor past the hall. Kisliakof looked round and saw Gusev. His heart dropped as the thought came to him that he had been seen talking (and this not for the first time) with the new director, and that it might perhaps be thought that he was betraying them.

Because of this he suddenly began to hurry.

'What, are you off to work?' asked Polukhin.

'Yes, it's time.'

'Very well, be sure to come.'

XII

HYPPOLIT KISLIAKOF HASTENED INTO THE LIBRARY. HE WANTED TO see whether Gusev was telling his fellow workers that he had seen him—Kisliakof—in friendly conversation with the new director. Gusev was seated, but the gloomy Galahof was standing near a case of rare exhibits, talking to the two short fellows who had appeared uninvited at the party. The bald-headed one was speaking in an excited undertone, Galahof listening in his usual way, looking down at the floor, and the other listened to what the bald-headed one was saying, glancing from time to time at Galahof, as if to see what impression was being made on him.

They continued to talk for some time after Kisliakof entered, then they parted. As Galahof passed to go to his seat, he did not look at Kisliakof or speak to him. This seemed suddenly suspicious: why had the conversation ended just when he entered the room? Why did they speak in low voices? Why did Galahof pass him in silence?

Of course, all these questions had a simple answer. They had stopped talking at the moment he entered because they had to stop at some time or another. They talked in low voices because it was usual to talk in an undertone in the library, and after the man in the blue apron had started working there they talked more quietly than ever. Galahof had passed him in silence because he was normally a silent man, and though he had been an invited guest on one occasion, it was impossible to expect that he should be grateful all his life for this, and be affable and never pass without saying a word of greeting.

All this was so, but, nevertheless, it seemed suspicious to Kisliakof.

He had to return to the reference room with the books which he had taken, as they proved to be not the ones he required, but he was afraid to go out lest they should all talk together during his absence and Gusev should tell everyone that he had seen him with Polukhin and had heard his last sentence advising Polukhin to put pressure on them.

In the doorway of the hall appeared Maslov, a tall dark scout. He had very cold and composed features, the coldness being emphasized by his straight dark eyebrows, which met over the bridge of his nose. His unnerving quietness made him disliked, and it made him appear to look down on all the employees as subordinates, and to consider himself as their superior. Kisliakof in particular did not like him: in Maslov there seemed to be some

power which prevented him from looking him quietly and simply in the eyes.

'Comrades, get ready,' said Maslov, addressing himself with the word 'comrades' more to the man in the blue apron and to the two technical employees who were dragging a box full of old newspapers across the floor.

Kisliakof, for some reason, for the first time looked the scout boldly in the eyes, as though he had nothing to hide and was quite ready to get up, but just stayed behind for a moment putting in order the papers which were thrown about on his table. He did this in order that his colleagues should not judge from his quick movement that he was playing up to the director, and when the scout left the room he deliberately sat down again and, opening one of the drawers, began to look through some papers. Actually, he did not look at any of them, but only made, from the point of view of the people of the educated class, a decent delay, so that he did not jump up at the first call of the director and did not go out before the others.

Of course, he must not hang back too long, as that would seem still more suspicious to Gusev, who would think: 'He talked about something in private with the director and then, when he has to go to the meeting, pretends to ignore it, and as a sign of protest, goes last.'

He was really becoming alarmed by the fact that somehow he remained alone. A group of people passed in front of him, talking excitedly, discussing the situation in lowered tones, then another party of three went and he had to join a group of four in order not to be left by himself.

He had told himself that the worst thing was that when a man is divided within himself he must let his conscience be the deciding factor. Once he has decided on which side his sympathies lie and to where his path leads, there is nothing further to worry about. In the present case, he was on the side of Polukhin, who had just singled him out from all the others, whilst all these, even the ones who yesterday had been his guests, did not exchange a single word with him and did not reveal what they thought about him.

From the other point of view, if the kind attitude of Polukhin suddenly proved to be a pure accident and to-morrow he would forget all about him. . . . Then what?

In his former occupation, when he was doing his proper work, he had always a clear inner sanction for what he should do or should not do. Now he had no judgment whatever, and must be content to look round and decide in what direction he must lean in order to preserve himself whole. To an observer this could be seen from his stained, disturbed face, the face of a man who

was afraid and had absolutely lost his nerve, in spite of his continuous efforts to build up some inner centre of resistance. He was forced back on to the reserve of human dignity, and the auto-suggestion that he was eventually superior to everything. He even tried to think about his immortal soul, which must not fear the negligible, purely external conditions of life, but rise above them.

Thought about his immortal soul was something quite new to his general way of thinking, as he was a man with no faith in any sort of immortality; but, like a man who, being ill, has tried out all the latest remedies and turns sometimes in despair to sooth-sayers, so now he thought about his soul when nothing else could help him.

There was another point of view which for a certain length of time really helped: it told him that everything around was perishing, and for this reason he must find distraction in something, it did not matter what, so that he should not see, nor hear, nor feel, but burn out like a firework, and then—*finis*. This filled him with an erotic longing to perish, but it did not last long. The moment he experienced any real agitation or sense of danger it ceased to be effective.

Even now, when he entered the meeting in the large auditorium, his heart beat most disagreeably and his agitation could be noticed, in spite of all the precautions he was taking to conceal his inner feelings: first by gazing thoughtfully at his hands, then turning over, page by page, the leaves of his notebook, elevating his eyebrows meaningly and making notes with his pencil, though actually there was nothing to note and he was only writing over what was already there.

In the auditorium nearly all the benches, which sloped up from the platform as in a theatre, were occupied, and the people already seated were looking round at each arrival, following him with their eyes as he chose his seat, as he squeezed himself past the knees of those who were already seated or, blushing under the gaze of all these glances, asked those seated to move up.

It seemed to Kisliakof that everyone watched closely to see where he would seat himself. He thought of Polukhin's attitude towards him and tried to persuade himself that his conscience was clear and that he had definitely chosen the direction of his sympathies, and for this reason he could sit where he liked without qualms. This business affected his colleagues more than himself.

On the platform stood a table covered with a red cloth. Behind it were seated two Communist scouts—Maslov and the fair-haired Churikov, who in a sort of naive way was raising his eyebrows, staring at the paper in front of him and continually tugging at the back of his shirt.

'Whenever did they dig up that red table cloth?' mused Kisliakof, ill-naturedly.

Punctually at four o'clock Polukhin entered through a side door and went to the platform, and Kisliakof experienced a feeling of pleasure such as people feel when they see on the platform someone well known to them with whom they have just had a private and intimate talk.

Polukhin went straight to his chair, like the chairman of a meeting where everyone is in his place, and without losing a minute, without distracting himself by looking round the people assembled there, settled down to business.

Leaning forward, with the palms of his hands resting on the table, he was about to open the meeting when the fair-haired scout leaned over to him and, pulling him by the back of his shirt, showed him a paper. Maslov came round to the other side of Polukhin and also looked over the paper. The three of them had a whispered discussion before the silent audience. At the same time Polukhin raised his eye to the occupied benches, his glass eye sharp and immovable and his real one running concentratedly from face to face, while, with head bent slightly to one side, he listened to what Maslov had to say, Churikov trying to put in some remark, but getting no opportunity.

Kisliakof sat looking fixedly at Polukhin, as if wishing him to see that he was there and would meet his eye.

'How is it they get such a sense of their own importance, such composure and contempt for those whom they have brought here after working hours,' whispered one of the colleagues behind, leaning over to Kisliakof. Just at this moment Polukhin's gaze found Kisliakof, who, without returning his glance and at the same time remaining silent about the remark of his colleague, felt a sensation in his back as though someone had thrust a stick between his shoulder blades.

At last, waving away the two scouts, Polukhin, resting on the palms of his hands, leaned over the table. The hall was silent.

'Comrades,' said he, then waited for absolute silence. The purport of his speech caused all the employees of the educated class to exchange glances with each other.

'I came here to work and at first only looked round. I want to tell you what I have seen. If you agree with what I say, then let us make a change, in spite of the opposition of a certain section of the employees. However large this section is, perhaps we shall reduce it considerably.'

The people in the front rows sat staring before them with a look which said that as they had been called to the meeting, there they would sit, but 'an ass can be brought to the water, etc. . .'

In the back rows this sentence caused everyone to fidget in his seat and to look at each other meaningly.

'My investigation has been along two channels,' continued Polukhin, paying no heed to the disturbance at the back. 'The first is connected with the work itself, which seems to me to be a disgrace to the Soviet. We work here in the cause of science, but this science is so buried within these walls that it will never reach the masses. Of what use is such science to us?'

He paused, as though waiting for an answer, but the front rows sat with the same expression, each one who had his gaze fixed on one spot, be it the leg of the table or the fringe of the cloth, continued so to sit.

'We collect and collect, but what's the good of that to the working man who has no time to come and see? Then do we show anything? What is there to show? Tsars' beds and old water jugs? These were also shown here before the revolution.'

Kisliakof, who was looking round with the carefree expression of a man whose conscience is clear, met the eyes of a colleague sitting behind him, a small stout man with a bald head and white eyebrows. His astonishment was so great that his eyebrows were raised to such a height that the thin skin of his forehead was collected in small wrinkles. He looked meaningly at Kisliakof, who made, however, no answering grimace.

'Now, we must consider how to work and how to exhibit,' continued Polukhin, whilst the fair-haired Churikov, with an expression of lively agreement, tapped with his pencil on the table after each word, as though Polukhin was saying just what he was thinking.

'That is the first thing, and the second is that here in our midst there seems to be a secret pact between a certain portion of the workers. . . .' (the scanty eyebrows of the colleague behind Kisliakof went quite to the top of his forehead). 'They use all their efforts to put obstacles in the way of the newly admitted proletarian workers and their duties, they do not approach them with comradely help and instruction. They themselves work like clerks, finish their hours, and that's the end of it. We have not had a single communal meeting for a month, not a single excursion. Each one lives for himself. We have now a small percentage of young scouts. When I came there were none at all. You wanted to prepare a change for yourselves . . .' said he suddenly, unexpectedly addressing himself to the whole audience, the cheek beneath his glass eye trembled, 'and we must prepare to make change ourselves!' He almost shrieked, making an abrupt movement in the air with his hand.

Polukhin then seemed to lose his train of thought, and reached towards the decanter of water which was in front of him. But he continued:

'The working class moves along its own iron line and will know how to clear from its path all those who hamper it in the work, all those who put spokes in the wheels, who by their nature are incapable of entering into the collective. We are being frightened off with the suggestion that we cannot do without the old specialists. We will do without them. For a time, perhaps, we shall sustain a loss, and a great loss, but we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that there will be no need to guard our pocket, as only our own hands will take things from it. Is that so?'

He again made an abrupt movement with his hand. A large part of the audience, scouts and technical employees, and some of the colleagues applauded. The other part, even those who gazed steadily at the table legs and at the fringe of the cloth, turned round fearfully like soldiers who have calmly taken their position in the front line and then find that they are being fired on from behind by their own comrades.

'To start with, it will be necessary to take in ten people from *our* side and dispense with some of the old workers.'

He sat down, upright as usual, in his chair, and looked round the hall as calmly as though he had said nothing.

Then he jumped up again and said:

'Who wishes to express an opinion?'

All those of the educated class were silent. All that could be heard in the silence was the French chatter of Marya Pavlovna, who turned round to her neighbour and talked excitedly to her.

Andrey Ignatich got up. In his tall, gentlemanly figure there was a modest dignity and at the same time a marked desire to say something which might be very disagreeable to the 'comrade director'.

All the people of the educated class understood this from his attitude, and with perturbation and glances of good will they all awaited his outspoken speech.

He looked round the company and, seeming to sense support, said:

'Our new comrade director wants to compel science to come out and work in the market place. . . .'

He paused for a second. Everyone waited and only silently exchanged glances and showed in their eyes that they appreciated his courage, and that all their sympathy was with him.

'This would probably be effective as propaganda, rapid-fire propaganda, so to say, real science could only lose by it because science is a gradual process achieved slowly and in quietude.

Only under such conditions are the highest values of science created and verified.'

As if by now quite certain of the friendly support of all the people of the educated class in the auditorium, he no longer looked round, but addressing himself to the platform continued:

'One must also note that science is not a counter in a co-operative store' (the scout Churikov, who was scribbling designs on a piece of paper, trembled and wanted to jump up, but instead he hurriedly scribbled a note and handed it to Polukhin. Maslov and Polukhin made no sign, gazing quietly before them, although a partly frightened, partly elated whisper ran through the whole auditorium).

'As I say, not a co-operative counter,' continued Andrey Ignatich, 'it's not an interchangeable ticket. You may not misuse individuals. Because science respects individuality. Where individuality is suppressed science cruelly avenges itself. You can build as many scientific establishments as you like' (he made a sweeping gesture with his hand) 'and proclaim them as loudly as you wish, but that will not augment scientific values.'

Having said this in an already excited voice (his hands were moving up and down, the buttons of his suit were visibly trembling), he sat down.

An uneasy silence spread over the hall, which Andrey Ignatich had probably expected to resound with the wild applause of those who had made signs of support and good will to him with their eyes. But the hall did not resound.

'Comrade Churikov,' said Polukhin, rolling up the slip of paper which had been handed to him by Churikov, 'it is your turn to speak.'

Churikov got up hurriedly, as though he had been expecting every moment to be called upon, pulled his blouse from behind, and Polukhin made no sign, gazing quietly before them, although

'We have just heard the statement of one of the dying out caste of so called scientists. What does he offer? "Do not send science out into the street" he says. Then where must it go? Into their private studies? This man has in no way taken into account the new movement, which does not care a hang for science, which works for some unknown future and does not give live results to the masses who want to achieve results themselves and not to wait whole decades for the "gradual" results from "high priests." . . .'

He said this breathlessly, looking round all the time at the chairman, as if inquiring whether he was saying the right thing, and whether his time was not up.

'We have finished with "high priests" now!' continued Churikov. 'If they do not understand the requirements of the times

we will throw them out, and, notwithstanding, we will take science out into the street!’

He finished and sat down so unexpectedly that the sympathetic scouts and technical employees and a small part of the younger people of the educated class did not realize that this was the moment to applaud. A few seconds passed in silence and only then resounded provoking and triumphant applause.

Churikov, trying to look as composed as Polukhin and Maslov, was excitedly ruffling his hair and looking from one side to the other, where his friends were making signs.

Polukhin got up saying:

‘Comrade Churikov, in essence, spoke the truth. I think that *both* sides have given a full statement of the situation from their own point of view. We will not enlarge on all this. Does the meeting wish to adopt the following resolution. . . .’

‘Yes, yes,’ said several voices, though the front rows remained obdurate.

‘. . . . Having heard the report of Comrade Polukhin concerning the reorganization of the museum, the workers present at this general meeting declare that the work of the museum must be reorganized from its foundations, according to the principles of Marxism.’

‘In a Soviet scientific establishment there is no room for the science which works gradually, which does not keep pace with reality, but hangs back.’

‘We emphatically disown those foreign elements’ (the members of the educated class looked at each other indignantly) ‘which dare to perform scientific work on idealistic lines and are offensive towards Soviet scientific establishments.’

‘Who opposes this resolution?’ asked Polukhin, looking round the auditorium and this time not only his glass eye, but his living one also looked severe.

There was silence in the hall.

‘The resolution is carried unanimously,’ said Polukhin.

XIII

EARLY IN THE MORNING ELENA VICTOROVNA BEGAN TO PREPARE FOR her departure.

She took her gold trinkets for safe keeping to her neighbour Mme. Zvenigorodsky, with whom, despite the general quarrelling among the tenants, she was very friendly; they even shared each other's secrets. She took them to her, as she could not hope that her husband would lock the room up carefully. The whole day, however, proved to be very trying and her preparations were considerably hampered.

First, the electricity account was delivered and she had to collect the money. She hoped that she might get this over quickly and finish her packing, but it was the usual story: first one was not at home and the wife 'does not know' (What was there to know!), another was at home but the wife was not in and she had the money, a third had no money at the moment, had just had a stroke of bad luck and would be glad if she would pay the money in for him. In the kitchen the wives of the locksmiths began to scream that the charges were not fairly apportioned.

'How much light do you burn?' shrieked one, immediately on the offensive. 'When it comes to paying you are treated the same as we are.'

In truth, the locksmiths had only one small light, diffusing a dim yellow glow near the ceiling, and they went to bed at ten o'clock, and the plasterers had no light at all, but went to bed when they had finished their communal dish before it was dark; they had to get up before anyone else to go to their work.

'You have a lamp here, a lamp there, a lamp on your bottom!' shrieked the locksmith's wife, tearing the kerchief from her head and screwing it up in her hands.

'But all that is taken into account,' shouted Elena Victorovna, 'everyone has to pay for the number of lamps he burns.'

Here, though she regretted it later, she could not restrain herself from getting a thrust at the locksmith's wife:

'You think it is praiseworthy not to burn a lot of light, but you don't burn much because you are ignorant people and you have no spiritual or intellectual needs.'

'A—ah! It is all taken into account, and we have no needs! And who fixes an extra hundred candle power lamp? Is that how you occupy yourself with intellectual labours? We know what sort of intellectual labours you are busy with! We know everything. . . .'

of row, poured from their doors, and out came the children. The bulldog in Elena Victorovna's room scratched frantically with his paws on the door, thinking probably that someone was hurting his mistress.

Then Sophia Pavlovna Diakonov fought with the lower middle class woman over the small storeroom about which they had already quarrelled and been to court. Sophia Pavlovna wanted to put her washing in the bath; it was already filled with the washing of the lower middle class woman, this she threw out, then she burst open the door of the small storeroom about which they argued, and turned out all the litter belonging to the lower middle class woman. The other, seeing this, uttered a shriek probably similar to that with which Red Indians rush to scalp their victims, and seized her by the hair. All the onlookers urged them to stop, and the two Japs stood in the doorway of their room, with heads turned up, barking either one against the other or together.

'My God, an educated woman!' said Elena Victorovna, holding her head in her hands and going to her room. When the fight in the corridor was over, Zvenigorodsky, to whom she had entrusted her gold trinkets only an hour and a half ago, came to her, dressed in her hat and blue costume, with her pretty face and golden curls protruding beneath her hat and a tired expression on her face. She seated herself on the divan and silently took off her gloves from her thin, well-shaped hands. She was probably not in a condition to talk.

Then, having taken off her gloves and placed them on her knees, she said that her husband had turned her out of the room, and that she was going to apply at the court for him to be turned out instead.

'I must fight!' said she, extending her hands in an attitude of despair. 'Just to think that only a month ago he would not let me move, anticipated my every wish; and I remember' (she swallowed her tears) 'we stood near the window and he stroked my hand as he talked to me . . . and now. . . .'

'My God, an educated man!' said Elena Victorovna. 'Can it be that nothing sacred is left in life! Not even the slightest sense of dignity, nothing but calculation and looking after one's own skin?'

'But now he has killed my faith in men,' went on Zvenigorodsky, wiping her eyes hurriedly, 'I will do all in my power, even though I have to starve and sell my things, to poison his life. I have friends who will help me.'

Elena Victorovna listened to her compassionately, herself ready to cry, and at her words that she had friends who would help her, tenderly stroked her hand, but at the same time a

terrifying thought flashed through her mind: was it not a mistake that she had given the trinkets to her to keep?

The thought pricked so sharply that she could not get rid of it. An expression of alarm took the place of that of compassion. She did not even answer what her friend was saying, but thought all the time about her gold trinkets.

To ask for them back immediately after Zvenigorodsky had talked about starving and selling her own things was difficult, not only difficult, but for an educated person, impossible. At that moment the professor's wife, wearing an old-fashioned dress smelling of camphor, entered asking what was the best stuff with which to wash dogs. Zvenigorodsky immediately said good-bye and left the room.

XIV.

HYPPOLIT KISLIAKOF, THINKING THAT BY NOW HIS WIFE WOULD certainly have finished her packing and would not be worrying him every moment either to pack a case or to put some small thing or other away, returned home after the meeting with a feeling that the heavy storm cloud which had been hanging over him had unexpectedly passed and that the sun was shining again. Although the day was still dull and gloomy he had not a trace of the feeling of depression which he had in the morning. On the contrary, everything seemed comfortable, wonderful. He was not annoyed by the passers-by, but with a willingness by which even he himself was touched, he stepped aside and gave way. He even helped one old woman to carry her basket to the tramcar. At home, owing to his wife's departure, freedom and solitude awaited him.

One thing only disturbed him slightly: he had not expressed his sympathy with Andrey Ignatich at the treachery which had been meted out to him by the rest of the intelligentsia at the museum. Not a single one had raised his hand against the resolution, also, he had seen many of those who did not raise their hands approach him after the meeting and express their sympathy, but he had been unable to do this, as Polukhin had been passing down the corridor at the time.

What would Andrey Ignatich think now? . . . Kisliakof's temper was also spoiled somewhat by the thought that he would have to accompany his wife to the station and see her into the compartment, with the aunt and the dogs. It even occurred to him to pretend that he was unwell and in that way avoid these farewells.

He was almost on the threshold of the house when he turned aside abruptly. He did this because he saw a lady approaching him. She was the wife of one of his intimate friends, an engineer, who was in prison. He ought to have visited her long ago, but had not troubled, which made it inconvenient now to meet her, and therefore he avoided her each time he met her in the street, like someone who had a scald on the face. It was a shame that she might have the unpleasant thought that he had called when everything was all right, drinking her tea and cognac, but now that disaster had come, like all the other friends, kept out of the way.

He really had not been once to see her because he would have had to sympathize with her, and this might have seemed forced and unnatural.

Elena Victorovna had already finished her packing when he arrived. She looked at him closely and asked:

'What is the matter with you?'

'In what way?'

'You look drawn.'

'I don't feel very well.'

'Then you mustn't come to see me off.'

'What are you thinking about? You are going away for a whole month and I shall not come and see you off?'

Elena Victorovna approached him and silently kissed his head.

On the floor stood a travelling case and a round canvas bundle, tied at both ends with ropes. On the arm-chair was a shopping basket, packed tightly with provisions. The dogs had their blue bows on and sat in the middle of the room in their most festive manner, keeping their eyes on their mistress, probably understanding that they were going on a journey. Only when there was a ring or knock did they rush to the door, barking, but they returned immediately, wagging their tails, as though excusing themselves for the noise they had made. The train was due to leave at nine o'clock. They were going to the station in a taxicab and could quite well leave the house at 8.30, but Elena Victorovna, who was always afraid of being late, had ordered the taxicab for eight o'clock.

'But it is only five minutes from here, why idle about at the station for an hour?' said Kisliakof, with a feeling of annoyance against this senseless early departure and against the unnecessary arguments, as he knew there were some points on which Elena Victorovna would not give way and one of them was the early arrival at a railway station.

He decided to keep his temper, if only because she was going away very soon and that for a whole month in the year he could live alone in the room, think quietly and undisturbedly, go to bed when he wished and be able to read without constant interruption.

Sometimes she would say: 'Why is it, you are away all day at your work, I don't see you, and when you do come home you bury your nose in a book!'

Elena Victorovna sat near him, put her hand in his and said:

'At the moment of departure I always feel very sad to leave you. I feel quite ready to unpack and stay here with you, and this time I am really concerned about your feeling unwell. There is scarlet fever in the town.'

Kisliakof, who was holding his head in his hand, suddenly had a fear that she would not go and said:

'Oh, it is nothing, I haven't really any feeling of sickness.'

'It is only when one goes away that one fully realizes that one is not fair to one's own. We suffer from lack of space and various

small things and quite forget what a blessing it is to be able to live with the one we love, under the same roof, and to know that his every thought belongs to us,' said Elena Victorovna, and, taking her husband's hand, she pressed it tightly in her own.

'Now, when we see all these things going on around us,' continued Elena Victorovna, nodding in the direction of the room of the Zvenigorodskys, 'only then do we value such relationships as our own. I will repeat again and again that in this hard life we must use every effort to keep our souls from egosim, to preserve our love as our greatest treasure and to hold more firmly to each other.'

With the thought of the Zvenigorodskys she suddenly became thoughtful and uneasy, and after a time said to her husband:

'I gave Anna Nikolayna my gold trinkets, and the gold watch which was my present to you, to look after, because you always go out and leave the doors unlocked. Do you think it will be all right?'

For the moment Kisliakof felt a prick of annoyance at the constant references to his absent-mindedness (though he had only gone out once or twice, leaving the cupboard open, the reputation would stick to him all his life), but he again controlled himself and said:

'Of course it will be all right. She is a respectable woman. Aren't you ashamed to think otherwise?'

'If it had not seemed wrong I would have gone and taken them from her. So you think I can leave them?'

So though it appeared that a woman friend was more to be trusted than he, the master, with whose money everything was bought, Kisliakof had to say that they could be left. To start an argument as to his right to respect would have been too complicated, and not without danger, as Elena Victorovna might be upset and delay her departure.

Just as they were about to go out to the taxicab they heard Jerry give a terrific yell and sounds of a dog fight in the corridor. Elena Victorovna rushed out as though she had heard the call of her only son. It appeared that Jerry was fighting the Natanson's sheep dog. Children ran from all directions and encouraged the animals with their whistles and cries, so that at last even the two Japs, locked in their room, began to bark and yell, probably fighting each other.

At the same time the owners ran forward to separate their dogs and they also began to quarrel.

Jerry, with blood covered ear, was seized and carried away, he barked over the shoulder of his mistress and struggled to get out of her grasp and continue the fight. His ear was at once washed with boracic and bandaged.

Kisliakof, who never could stand animals, was always ashamed and irritated when he went out with his wife accompanied by the dogs. She would start to talk, but conversation at such times was quite impossible, as her whole attention was directed on the dogs lest they should run away or make some acquaintances on the road.

When he was silent, having no wish to compete with the dogs in holding her attention, she would at once say:

'Go on, go on, I am listening.'

If they were in the country he could always see the sarcastic glances of the peasant women, weeding in their vegetable gardens, who, with sneers on their faces, watched for a long time the departing figure of the short, stout woman and her 'family'.

Elena Victorovna had either an indestructible courage of her own convictions or was merely not observant, but she never took any notice of these glances and was always calm.

Now it was still worse. It was not enough that she was going to the station with the aunt, the dogs and the luggage, but one of the dogs must have a bandaged ear. It meant that all along the road the children would give them no peace—they would all point at her, and the neighbours would stand on the step and watch Elena Victorovna, like an old time lady departing for her estate, surrounded with a whole kennel; thinking probably: 'When the dogs have to be fed they manage all right, and fix strong lamps without paying anything extra. It would serve them right if they were charged double for their room.'

When they did go down to the taxicab all the children burst out laughing on seeing Jerry with his bandaged ear. They began to tease him from behind, making him bark, and Elena Victorovna could not understand what was the matter with him.

Kisliakof had to go back for a parcel which she had forgotten. He saw in the corridor at the top of the stairs the lady from No. 9. She was not in the lilac scarf in which he saw her in the mornings, but in a grey costume and checked peak cap, which suited her very well. The peak of the cap shaded her eyes in the dim light of the corridor, but Kisliakof could just catch her discreet smile as he bowed from the distance. Holding the candle, he stood near the door, but did not open it, watching the lady as she inserted the key and unlocked the door of her room. He waited in the hope that she would once again turn round towards him, but she did not, but, as though trying to escape his glances, hurried into her room and closed the door quietly behind her.

It seemed to Kisliakof that all that was beautiful in life passed him by, and all that was left for him was existence with a being who was of no use to him. He began to pity himself, standing for some time near his door, in the hope that the young woman would

come out. She did not, and he took the parcel and began to go downstairs.

'Where did you disappear?' cried Elena Victorovna as soon as she saw his legs on the stairs.

'I could not find it at first.'

'I always said that you looked at a thing and did not see it. One could leave an hour early with you and still be late in arriving.'

He had to accept the reproach without remonstrance, as he himself had said something which was untrue. He could not really say:

'I found the parcel at once, but I stopped on seeing our woman neighbour and thought about the uselessness of my life with you, as you don't interest me in any way.'

They arrived at the station fifty minutes before the train was due to leave, as he had expected, and sitting near the windows with the luggage and the dogs, drank mineral waters which they did not want, and did not know what to talk about.

The aunt, with an ancient hat perched awry on her head, sat with a pious expression on her face and talked in a half whisper to the bulldog, who kept his face turned away from her and only watched her with one eye under his raised eyebrow.

Kisliakof felt annoyed with Elena Victorovna for arriving so early and even then she was fussing about so much with the luggage that she was breathless. At the same time she fidgeted because the porter had gone away; the train would arrive and he would not be there. It was annoying, and she, at the same time, could not see the humour of her stoutness, these dogs, and this unnecessary fidgeting. Not for a moment, however, did she show that she had any doubt that her husband loved her and that he found her a most interesting woman.

So as not to look like a person of the educated class who is being compelled to emigrate, and not to be depressed by being unable to find anything to talk to his wife about in these last moments, Kisliakof wanted to get up and walk about, but Elena Victorovna prevented him.

'Please don't go away, the train will come in and you will disappear as you did when you went for the parcel. You went away for a moment and disappeared.'

'I shall see it when it comes and will return,' said Kisliakof sensing that the parcel had given her something to talk about for three months.

'Never mind, don't go.'

Elena Victorovna turned away from him, as if certain that her orders, delivered in such a categorical manner, would not be disobeyed, and she looked about anxiously in different directions.

'You had better look for the porter.'

When they got on the train Elena Victorovna left her aunt in the compartment to look after the luggage, and herself went out on to the platform to stand there with her husband, as loving couples stand until the train leaves, after which they wave to each other with their handkerchiefs when the train moves off, continuing to do so for a long time and showing by this how great is their love.

Kisliakof stood on the platform. Remembering that he was not well, Elena Victorovna was urging him to go home, but he, tightening his overcoat round his throat and holding it with his hand, refused to go, showing thereby his love and care for her. From time to time he glanced at the large station clock and it seemed to him that the hands were not moving at all. There were still five minutes, but with all this stupid standing about they seemed like five hours.

Though neither of them knew what to talk about, in order not to stand there silently, they discussed things which had been done with long ago.

'Why don't we go?' asked Elena Victorovna. 'Hasn't the bell rung?'

'Strange,' answered Kisliakof, looking sideways through his pince-nez at the station clock. 'Two minutes late and the train isn't moving. Will you tell me, please, why the train doesn't go?' he addressed a passing guard. 'You see it is late.'

'The clock is ten minutes fast,' answered the guard, glancing quickly at the station clock as he passed.

When at last the train left Kisliakof walked alongside of it for some distance, waving his handkerchief and moving further away from it as it went more quickly, so as to see his wife longer in the straightening line of windows.

When the train had gathered such speed that he could make it appear that he had lost sight of her, though she was still visible at the window, he went out of the station and jumped into a passing tram.

On his way home he was already thinking what a blessing it was that people who lived together under the same roof did not know what one thought about the other.

Entering his lodging, Kisliakof, with a throbbing heart, saw a telegram which had been pushed under the door. Opening it he read:

'We arrive after 15th. Arkadv.'

XV

HYPPOLIT KISLIAKOF WENT HOME WITH A FEELING OF IMPATIENCE. He wanted more quickly to experience the pleasure of being alone at last, he was tired of being unable to have a moment to himself.

When he entered the room and approached the book-shelf, on looking at the books he suddenly experienced a definite sense of boredom. He did not know what to do with himself, and had no desire to touch any of the books. The empty room gave him no pleasure, but depressed him with its silence, and he was impelled to get up and go out.

Evidently the interruption of his spiritual life had caused a sort of paralysis. When his wife, the aunt and the dogs were about he still hoped that everything was alive in him and that it was only the conditions under which he lived which upset him, now he felt clearly his inner emptiness.

For a long time Kisliakof had noticed dangerous symptoms: he could not sit alone for a single hour, but felt the urge to go out into the street, to theatre, as though owing to this inner stagnation he must have external stimulants.

In his youth Hyppolit Kisliakof had shared all the intellectual traditions of the main mass of students to which he belonged. He sympathized vigorously with the activities of all progressive parties, as he knew that they worked for the abolition of all forms of violence on earth. He pictured to himself the heroes of the revolution as martyrs who risked their lives to accomplish great deeds, and their continuous readiness to face death for this ideal attracted him more than anything. Although this sympathy was purely platonic it developed in him a hatred of all forms of violence, and the revolution in theory appeared to him in the first place as a complete liberation of the individual and of the abolition of all forms of pressure by the governing authorities and by anyone else.

When the actual revolution came, its heroes showed a desire to live for the revolution rather than to die for it. They even began to use force against those who, according to the ideals of the intelligentsia, ought to receive the fullest liberty, independence of their class and their beliefs. Moreover, the individual in the revolution occupied quite a different place under the new regime from what had been expected. And very unpleasant things happened.

The people, the proletariat, who were so touching and wonderful when oppressed by the other classes, absolutely ceased to be touch-

ing and wonderful when they themselves began to oppress these classes and to proclaim their own existence in a most definite way; by walking about in exercise shirts and high boots, and occupying positions in all establishments.

Kisliakof had been a locomotive engineer and had loved the railway track with that devotion which can only be understood by railway workers.

Having travelled all over Russia before the War, being employed on works and surveys, he sometimes sat for whole nights studying a map. He was attracted by Siberia, he wanted to build there--which meant not only to build, but to conquer a waste and create a new land.

During the War he executed important work with extraordinary energy and quickness, and from that moment he clearly sensed his career. The belief in his gifts of those who surrounded him reacted very strongly on him and made his strength tenfold.

He did not cease dreaming about Siberia, picturing the appearance, on what had been previously a waste, of an army of conquerors, of excavators, carpenters, stone-masons, of how the future railway line would unfold like a serpent, and how the flat surface would become covered with small heaps and slopes, populated with busy people. He dreamed of the exciting moment when at last the track would be laid and he would see the first engine start. Only a railwayman knows what the builder lives through at such a moment.

The creation of such new world-arteries had in the past been the business of his life. He knew himself as a leader whose commands were obeyed by whole armies of people, but in the first months of the revolution he felt that his personality was fading in some way, and when from a leader he changed into an ordinary worker, he felt that he was humiliated.

He could not think, without a sensation of horror, that he would be compelled to come in contact with the working mass, be under its control and even almost bow down to it. If he wanted to advance with the working class he would have to make speeches, and having made speeches he would have incited to violence, as the revolution followed the lines of a civil war and destroyed thereby all the ideals of the people of the educated class: 'Justice for all, without distinction of class.'

Although to him his work was the most important thing in life, he decided to give it up, to wait. This was just a disaster of the elements, like an earthquake; and the more he met people who had also given up their work for the same reason, the more his conscience was quieted: he was not alone in this position.

As it was necessary to eat and to drink, however, he decided that he must enter some neutral zone of human activity. He

would do just enough to provide himself with food; he would give them a pretence instead of something really creative. Such a pretence, from his point of view, was the work in the museum, which he entered through the influence of one of his acquaintances, trying to hide his speciality. He continued to believe that his treasure was intact and that it was stored within him, like clothes laid away with moth balls in the pockets, and this belief forced him even now to look with contempt upon the people of the educated class who only *served*, having no inner solidarity.

Not until now, as he returned from the station, did he realize with horror that there was nothing within him. Revealed to him, after his wife's departure, for the first time, this inner emptiness frightened him.

And not only was he dead within, but the class to which he clung decreased daily in numbers. Because of this Polukhin was the only means by which he might save his life and the only hope of catching up with a spiritual life which had gone ahead of him.

XVI

THE POSSIBILITY OF FINDING SOME SORT OF UNION WITH THE NEW life of Russia was furthered by his improving relationship with Polukhin. The conscience of a man of the educated class, according to tradition, is generally very sensitive to honesty of thought, to sincerity of relationships, with which must be combined disinterestedness, especially among friends.

Until this time Hyppolit Kisliakof had not asked himself to what extent his relations with Polukhin were sincere and disinterested. He experienced first of all the joy of being saved, and there sprang up within him towards Polukhin a feeling of gratitude which resembled love.

With cheerful spirit he prepared to go to the museum, where he had to meet Polukhin and continue the strengthening of their friendly tie, which was to be the means whereby he would again come in contact with real life.

While still in his room he suddenly felt a gnawing feeling in his left side, a sign that something was not quite right, that there was some disturbing fact he had not faced.

He remembered: it was the relationship between his colleagues and himself. Perhaps it was only his imagination, or perhaps they really noticed something, put their own construction on it and thought: 'Can we rely on the decency of any man after this? We considered him as one of ourselves, in whose presence there was no need to take precautions, and he proves to be a traitor.'

This thought disturbed him so much, and made him so absent-minded, that as he went along the corridor he did not notice that he put his foot into something. From behind came a resounding shriek:

'Where are *you* blundering? Can't you see the paint there?'

It appeared that painters had left a tin of paint near the cupboard. Kisliakof was so far from the thought of what this paint could matter to him that he took no notice and went out of the corridor.

'Strange' said he to himself. 'What does this continual dependence on what others think mean? Can I or can I not have my own sympathies and at last my own choice of the direction in which my life shall go? Why should I look round at every step I make? Having decided on my path, I must go on! I can affirm, looking anyone straight in the eye, that I consider Polukhin to be a splendid man, and for this reason I am friendly with him.'

They could reply to this:

'This is not a matter of who is splendid, but of convictions and of membership of a class. It means that you betray us and your class and enter into friendship with one whose mission is to wipe us off the earth.'

To this he could reply that a man's convictions could change, it often happens that a man becomes a stranger to his own class and goes over to the side of another class, with which he has found mutual convictions.

Here the matter became complicated, because he might be asked:

'Is it long since you found that you had a common ground of conviction with this class? How long is it since you yourself were indignant at the enslavement of personality. Not twenty-four hours ago you developed the story of the ass which could be brought to the water, and so on. Not so long ago you said that Polukhin was a savage, who knew no better, in his ignorance, than to destroy what was well done.'

Alas, this was the truth, because he had the habit of saying aloud that which was nearest to his heart to the one who at that moment seemed to be a good man.

He had really said to Galahof on the first day that Polukhin went to work there that he was a savage, and now it was possible for the same Galahof to say to Polukhin at an inopportune moment:

'Do you know what this individual says about you? . . .'

These reflections filled him with confusion and held him in the grip of a nervous tension, as though he were lowering himself by means of a rope over a precipice, risking his life with every careless step. As a result he experienced continuous heart trouble, anticipating a dishonourable exposure, if not from the one side, then from the other.

This time everything turned out satisfactorily. He entered the entrance hall, struggling for some time with the heavy door, which dragged him in with its weight; he gave his overcoat to Sergey Ivanovitch as usual, turning it inside out with the stitched part hidden inside, and suddenly saw Polukhin on the staircase. He stood there and waited for him.

'I am glad that I met you, Comrade Kisliakof.'

Kisliakof was at first afraid that Polukhin would ask him his impressions of the meeting and that this might be overheard by one of his colleagues passing from the library. The greeting 'Comrade Kisliakof,' also, was disturbing to his ear, in some way it offended him.

Polukhin walked along the corridor in front of Kisliakof and

began to talk, but not about the meeting. At the entrance of the first hall he stopped.

'You remember asking me what I was looking at here and I told you that a thought had come to my mind?'

'Yes, I remember. . . .'

'Well, you see, when I came here first of all and looked round I felt that all this was . . . tomfoolery.'

'What was tomfoolery?'

'All this business . . . what are we doing here? Guarding some sort of tombs, and not only tombs, but relics. And these Tsars' swords. . . . Once we treat them with such respect others will do the same, the people who come here . . .'

'Absolutely true,' said Kisliakof.

'Here are past centuries and it means that we here are living in the past. All these dead things are stagnant: they must be forced to move. Am I not right?'

'Quite right,' said Kisliakof, but he did not reply at once, as he did not quite understand Polukhin's thought and had not the courage to show it.

'The museum must be arranged so that it does not merely preserve the past, but so that it will show from where we have come and where we are going. Is that not so? Do you agree?'

Kisliakof again said that it was quite right, but again not at once, but after some thought, otherwise Polukhin might think that he did not understand but merely agreed in order not to contradict his chief.

'We are not so rich that we can afford to have tombs, and in addition, useless ones, standing here. We must have exhibits which show the road along which we have advanced and along which we are now advancing. This will be a useful museum then!' said Polukhin, emphasizing every word by waving his hand up and down in front of him, with the index finger protruding, like a choir master.

Kisliakof began to understand what Polukhin was driving at and at the same time he felt that the life which had left him began to come nearer.

'I understand,' said he. 'We must make the museum keep pace with the reconstruction outside, and in every living specimen show not only the past, but the whole course of progress, including the present, with its achievements and conquests. Also the past must be so grouped that instead of being composed of separate objects it shows movement.'

'How smart you are, comrade. You have grasped it at once,' said Polukhin, slapping Kisliakof on the shoulder and filling him with unexpected joy. It was joy that he had understood Polukhin and would be still more intimate with him, and joy

that he had shown that he, from all those condemned, would be useful in the new life. Finally, it was joy because there seemed to flow within him something new and that he was faced with some interesting work in close friendship with the director Polukhin.

'Do you know what?' said he. 'I will make myself busy with drawing up a scheme for the reorganization of the museum.'

'Excellent! Get on with it.'

'And I will drop all these old religious paintings.'

'To the devil with them. What's the use of all that painting?' said Polukhin, waving his hand vigorously. 'Now, you are a live man, but all your colleagues here are . . . only grave diggers, nothing else. Isn't that so? Yours is the sort of mind we need. . . . And the French language also is not necessary,' ended Polukhin, referring, probably, to Marya Pavlovna.

'Yes, certainly,' agreed Kisliakof. 'We must bring suitable people together, the younger ones will fit in better.'

Gusev passed behind them and Kisliakof felt a disagreeable sensation in his spine. This was the second time, for some reason, that he had passed. He will go and tell Galahof, who will say:

'My God! What do you think of such people! It was only recently that he referred to the director as a savage, who would ruin the work, and now he is friendly with him. . . .'

'Do you know, Andrey Zaharovitch,' said Kisliakof, 'my meeting with you was most unexpected.'

'But why?'

'When you came here my thoughts were: "This man, who is quite strange to our work, will destroy everything," but you have immediately seen what is needed here and have filled me with enthusiasm.'

He said this instinctively and with every wish to be quite sincere; it came out without any calculation that if Galahof did really speak about him, Polukhin would only smile with his living eye and answer:

'I know, he himself told me about it.'

'So you will take it on?' asked Polukhin.

'Certainly.'

'That's right. Get on with it.'

XVII

THE NEXT DAY ARKADY NESNAMOF ARRIVED, AND IN THE EVENING Kisliakof prepared to go and see him. He really prepared, trying to dress himself as smartly as possible. It seemed to him that with the carelessness of Arkady in matters of dress, a carefully and well-dressed man would create a good impression on his young wife.

This, however, led to trouble. First, as he hurriedly put his boots on one of the laces broke and had to be tied in a knot. The ends of the knot showed and had to be cut off, then the knot became unfastened. In addition, the heels of the boots, worn down on one side by the asphalt pavements, had a poverty-stricken appearance, and were discoloured, as he had not always patience to polish them at the back.

Instead of proper elastic braces he had for a long time used window cord. As he had no meetings with women, he quite coolly cut the cord from the windows to make himself braces, and spread out his tie so that it hid the worn part of his shirt. Now, at the thought of what Arkady's wife would have thought could she have seen him doing that sort of thing, he became ashamed, and even blushed. It was as if there was someone in the room watching the manipulation of his attire.

Elena Victorovna does not worry, she goes to the Volga to get fresh air, and buys new clothes for herself, whilst he, when he prepares to visit decent people, is obliged to busy himself with black magic over his suit and overcoat. Yes, and in addition the overcoat! With stitches in the back!

He took off his pince-nez and rubbed the place where they had left a red mark, then he began to shave. He upset a metal tumbler for shaving water on the dressing table. Immediately, from the direction of the lower middle class woman's room behind the partition, there came a voice:

'Perhaps you would like some boiling water? I have some in the kettle.'

This told him that if she knew by the sound of the falling tumbler that he was about to shave, then this woman could hear everything that went on in the room.

With a frightened expression he glanced at the partition and, without the aid of his pince-nez, with his short-sighted eyes, he saw two enormous bugs.

Ever since the lower middle class woman had come to live on the same floor, the whole flat had suffered from an invasion

of bugs. It was no use trying to destroy them, as other followed fast.

'Do these bugs swarm from your place?' asked Kisliakof with irritation, lathering his chin.

'No, I have none, they don't bite me,' answered the woman behind the partition.

Arkady's flat on the Sadovaya was some distance from where Kisliakof lived, but he decided to walk, in order that his cheeks, which were quite flushed after fussing about with his dressing, might cool down.

Arkady Nesnamof, as Kisliakof knew him in his youth, was a tall, awkward and somewhat reticent fellow, full of kindness and with belief in mankind. In principle his attitude was severe, but he always spoke about those with whom he was intimate as 'a most excellent man,' or 'a very clever chap'.

They had lived together throughout their years of studentship. Arkady had run about in winter in a thin old overcoat, giving lessons, hating the *bourgeois* and being proud of his poverty.

He had dreamed of the time when the tempest of life would scatter to the wind the dull, sated, stolid mass of respectable humanity.

In his friendly arguments with Kisliakof he always disagreed on one point. Kisliakof considered the individual and his rights as the most important matter, but Arkady said that truth and justice should take first place. If individuality were admitted, then dozens of other weaker qualities would add themselves, whilst there must be equality and universal justice for every-one. Arkady hated everything which was popularly considered necessary and of the established order. He led an ascetic life, sharing his last kopeck with a friend and cursing when the friend promised to repay it soon. He always slept on bare boards, but the thing he hated most was religion, because it forced men to accept evil with humility instead of fighting against it.

Arkady occupied two rooms in a three-storied house down a side street.

The streets were already dark, and the locality was gloomy.

As he approached the house Kisliakof felt that his heart beat more strongly, and the flush, which had disappeared during the walk, returned to his cheeks. He was thinking all the time that in a few moments he would be meeting his friend and his wife. Had she realized the special tone of the telegram?

In the entrance hall there was a smell of paint, and shavings

of wood were scattered about on the floor. Probably some repairs were being made.

He opened the glass door and involuntarily stopped to look at his reflection in the glass by the light of the lamp. His cheeks were still flushed, even his ears were red. He put his hands up to cool them and they became still redder. In the wide corridor of the second floor there were doors on both sides, as in an hotel. The walls had just been whitewashed and the doors were being painted. Sheets of paper had been spread over the doors of Arkady's flat, so that those going in would not daub themselves with paint. The doors were open. In the room could be seen unpacked trunks, a lighted candle stood on the table and the electric lamp was not lit. Some cooked sausage lay on a piece of paper and there was an empty glass and cup on the table. Probably they had just had tea.

In the middle of the room stood a man in a linen blouse without a belt, with his sleeves rolled up and with his hair falling over his face. He was occupied in unpacking a wooden box, from the top boards of which he was pulling out nails with a pair of pincers.

In the large figure and the hair Kisliakof at once recognized Arkady Nesnamof.

At the sound of footsteps Arkady raised his head and, throwing back his hair, smiled kindly.

'I am pleased to see you.'

At first glance Kisliakof noticed a great change in Arkady. In the old days, on meeting a friend, he would have shouted at the top of his voice, 'Ah, here he is, the rascal,' or something of the sort, but now there was some sort of confused restlessness in him; he began to look around the room for some place in which to seat his guest; there was none of the old noisiness, sweeping gestures and eagerness.

He had long hair, which he had the habit of throwing back with his hand when talking, and a small beard, which he occasionally twisted. He was somewhat clumsy, absent-minded, and good-natured. There was always something wrong with his dress, he either forgot to put something on or put it on inside out.

'Why are you sitting here in the candlelight?'

'We've blown out a fuse. Will you have some tea?'

'No, why waste time on making tea?' said Kisliakof in a buoyant, high-spirited tone, as he thought that Arkady's wife was behind the closed door of the other room. 'Come closer and let me have a look at you,' said he, taking his friend by the elbow and turning him towards the light. 'You also, my friend, have aged. . . . Did you get my wire?' asked Kisliakof, still in the same high-spirited tone.

'Yes, yes, many thanks. Both Tamara and I have been looking

forward to Moscow as to the promised land. . . . And you yourself are even elegantly dressed—collar, tie, a good suit,’ said Arkady, surveying his friend.

‘You don’t know with what impatience I have awaited you both.’ said Kisliakof.

‘Yes, my dear friend, how many years is it since we saw each other? So you are working? . . .’

‘I am working,’ answered Kisliakof hesitatingly. ‘Now, tell me what is happening in the provinces.’

‘Things are bad. The worst thing is that there is absolutely no society, everyone sits in his dugout and has no common interests with anyone else. For this reason people only meet together to drink vodka, and then they drink a lot—even the women and girls,’ said Arkady, seating himself on the box with the pincers in his hand. ‘But what can you expect? There is no purpose in life, and as someone said, purpose is the God of living man.’

‘Yes, that is true.’

‘And so . . . because of this no one has any interest in anything; people’s interests do not extend beyond white flour. The general feeling amongst the people of the educated class is that they are like Egyptian slaves, who have been set to build pyramids which will form their own graves. You see, it is as though we people have finished with everything—at one moment we are filled with fright, the next we long to find forgetfulness,’ said Arkady. ‘At work no one does anything thorough; every man distrusts his neighbour and is always on the alert. So we sit and look round at each other. Of all the people of the educated class in the town only two left a good impression on me: only two, they are Uncle Misha and Levotchka, as we call them. They are most excellent people, with great spiritual aspirations; they, somehow, gave us a chance to breathe: two only in the whole town.’

Arkady did not ask his friend whether he was a Communist or not, and to Kisliakof came the thought that perhaps he was thinking: ‘The fellow is merry, it seems he has arranged his affairs all right.’

Because of this, and in order that Arkady should not think him strange, Kisliakof said:

‘Yes, my friend, things are bad here as well. We work only for a piece of bread, because, as you very truly said, we have no purpose in life. In every one of us purpose has been killed and no foreign purpose can produce faith. How can we even consider this, knowing that there is no future?’

He said this in order to be able, if Arkady asked: ‘What are you now and what do you do?’ to cover the fact that he had been forced to play false at his work.

Arkady got up from the box, and with the pincers in his hand, began to pace the room.

'Yes,' said he, after some thought, 'the Russian intelligentsia, as we understand it, came into being in the Belinsky era and finished with Lenin. Shall we be able to find a new consciousness, the old one having died? If we cannot, then we shall degenerate, because no social group can exist without a purpose.'

Kisliakof could not recognize his calmness, it caused him to be nervous and produced a longing to tell Arkady all about himself in a way which would be definitely appreciated, to make it appear that in no way had he betrayed the principles of the intelligentsia.

He also spoke with animation, because of the feeling within him and also because the wife of Arkady was in the other room, and, assuming that she was of the same point of view as Arkady, it was pleasing that she should hear him. Probably she was now dressing for his benefit.

It was not desirable that he should inquire about her, as Arkady might think that he came chiefly because of her. He only listened, therefore, for the slightest sound behind the door, but heard nothing.

'If misfortune comes to someone, then all his friends cool off and begin to avoid him in order not to be obliged to help,' continued Kisliakof.

'Yes, it is a terrible thing,' said Arkady, gazing thoughtfully through his pince-nez at something in the distance.

'And what a moral collapse! Now, in one of the flats in our house lives a couple, they are both good-looking and still young, not long ago they were looked upon as exemplary, now they are divorced—he has thrown her out of the flat and lives with a new wife, and she is suing him in court, they are certain to have legal proceedings about the furniture.'

Arkady frowned painfully.

'Just think of going to court about furniture with the being with whom you had mutual spiritual joys.'

'They go to court for the reason that no longer have they any joy left—that is the moral degeneration,' said Arkady. Then after some thought he added: 'Yes, God has gone out of our lives. Is it for ever or not?'

Kisliakof was astonished by this mention of God, of whom Arkady would not even hear in the old days. He did not, however, express his astonishment, but even added himself: 'Yes, you are quite right. It is just so. God has gone out of our lives and all that remains is the animal struggling for existence.'

'And what is the general position?'

'What about the general position?' said Kisliakof, shrugging

his shoulders, and before he had time to recollect himself he said: 'White flour thirty roubles a pud. A state in which creativeness and personality are being squeezed out of existence is flourishing. They try to their utmost to reconstruct everything, but in erecting stone buildings completely destroy the human personality and soul. They think that everything can be done by compulsion, but there is a good English saying——'

'But what do the Communist themselves stand for?' asked Arkady, interrupting his friend.

Kisliakof was on the point of saying that mostly they were stubborn fanatics, who were unable to see realities, all the principles of life having been replaced by the principle of force, that they had killed all free thought in the land, and so on, but he suddenly felt moral shame before the absent Polukhin, as it meant that he would say one thing to his face and quite a different thing behind his back.

'Do you know, I have recently taken notice of the Communists,' said Kisliakof. 'I have watched them closely, and I must affirm that in spite of their policy, which is wrong from beginning to end, there are in their midst people of the highest integrity; more than that, there are fine personalities, and they offer great possibilities for creative work and allow a man with initiative full freedom; but he must work. At the same time the arrogance of superiority is entirely absent. They know how to choose people, there one must give them their due.'

'Yes, I can agree with you there. For science, for example, they do a lot. The previous Government didn't do a tenth part of what they are doing. All this is true,' said Arkady sadly.

Kisliakof became more animated because Arkady praised the Communists, the fact that his friend understood and that he could speak frankly and wholeheartedly cheered him, and he continued:

'In their midst one does more often come across a man who is worthy of esteem than among the intelligentsia. They have their own purpose, which, if you like, they hold sacred, but our intelligentsia——'

'Has a broken spine,' interrupted Arkady with a sweeping gesture, and added:

'Yes, the spine is broken. . . . There's menace of a broken spine for half the human race. Their soulful pose is vanity.' Arkady pointed with his fingers to the West. 'Mankind has not yet appreciated with what persistence the stone of the history of the world is being struck, and the time is at hand when this stone will crack and break into dust.'

'And where is the wife?' asked Kisliakof, deciding that the time had come when he could ask about her. Perhaps it was even wrong not to ask.

'She hurried off to some of her theatrical friends, you know she is a budding actress and just now she is running about, but cannot get settled anywhere. I sometimes feel concerned and frightened about her.'

Kisliakof felt slightly annoyed. He had sent a telegram with such warm, intimate wishes, which he had meant for her, and she could not even stay at home that evening, although she knew that he would call.

He had visions of a fine romantic friendship with her, a half brotherly friendship, as he could not think of the wife of his friend in any other sense. She might be a sort of sister to him, with an elusive efflorescence of some other suppressed feeling, which would only strengthen and sharpen their intimacy.

'Here is her photograph,' said Arkady. He went into the other room, and through the half-open door Kisliakof saw the unmade bed, probably just as they had left it that morning, and a large walnut chair on which were thrown about stockings and other **parts of a woman's garments**. He glanced round the room and could not see any traces of a woman's touch.

Arkady brought in a photograph and handed it to his friend, then he returned to his box, as if not wishing to disturb his impression and probably at the same time waiting for the judgment.

Kisliakof looked at the photograph of a woman, or rather a girl, of about twenty years. She was wearing a wide blouse, a short skirt and long stockings which he could see to above the knees. She was seated on a fence, probably the photograph had been taken somewhere in the country. The first thing to catch his eye was her legs. It was strange to see in such a slender girl, legs which were so long and so round at the bend of the knees.

'Well, what do you think of her?' asked Arkady.

'Very beautiful,' said Kisliakof, and he reflected that he could not have asked Arkady with such pride about his Elena Victorovna.

Arkady was obviously pleased to hear his friend's opinion, but he made no show of it and busied himself with the box. He wanted to raise the lid, but could not grasp the top of the nails with the pincers, as they were hammered too far into the soft wood. He could not find anything suitable for the purpose.

'Here, try with this,' said Kisliakof, taking his dagger out from under his jacket.

Without looking up, Arkady took the dagger and inserted it under the lid, but instead of turning upward it slipped down a crack at the side. Uttering a cry, Arkady pressed his hand over his cut finger. The blood spurted out on to the floor and on the covering of the arm-chair, and when he went into the bedroom to wash and bandage the wound a trail of blood remained on the floor.

'How clumsy you are,' said Kisliakof.

All the time he sat waiting in the hope that the hostess would return, but it was already eleven o'clock and the house gates were closed at half-past eleven, after which he would have to give the porter a tip unless it happened that other people entered at the same time, in which case he could go in with the crowd without giving anything, as it could not be said who rang first.

He was annoyed that he had received no attention from Tamara and that all his psychical tuning up had been in vain.

'You must forgive her, please; she came to Moscow in such a rush that it was impossible for her to stay at home this evening,' said Arkady confusedly, as though feeling that it was wrong that he should be seeing his friend out.

As Kisliakof walked home he thought of the change which he had seen in Arkady. He had, probably, in some way turned to religion, whilst Kisliakof himself could not understand such leanings; still, though they were different spiritually, they shared a mutual negative attitude towards the new regime. And then, of course, an intelligent man must be instinctively forbearing towards other people's opinions, and Kisliakof had listened with the greatest interest to that which was foreign to him, but near to his friend.

XVIII

NEXT EVENING KISLIAKOF VISITED HIS FRIEND SOMEWHAT EARLIER so as to be certain to find Tamara in, in case she intended going out somewhere later, but when he arrived, again she was not there.

Arkady was pacing up and down the room and seemed perturbed.

'She said that she would be back at five, but probably something has detained her.'

He went to the window, where all manner of scientific apparatus was standing, and, shaking a flask containing some liquid, held it up to the light. His appearance seemed to show that he wanted to tell his friend something, but hadn't the courage to do so.

At last he stood still and said:

'I am very upset about the sort of people she is associating with. There are now in life only three things which are precious to me and for which I live: they are my science, your friendship, and lastly, the love of Tamara. I have always regarded women as being finer and nobler than we are; I have never had unclean thoughts in connection with women. I have always imagined them as mother, sister, friend. She has always represented to me something which forced me to be better,' said Arkady, as usual somewhat shyly when he was expressing inner thoughts, of which he always seemed to be shy and ashamed.

'You will say that in this, as in my belief in man, I am a strange idealist.'

'No, I will not say that you are a strange idealist,' said Kisliakof. 'Such things are so scarce now that we can only value such people as rare jewels.'

'Now there you exaggerate. . . .'

'But I repeat it.'

'I was telling you about the people with whom she is mixing. What can I say? This generation gets nowhere; they have got away from the old life and the new will not accept them, so they remain morally naked. This generation carried within itself no treasure of thought, no serious feeling of upliftment, it is not capable of it and its chief aim is to fight its way in life and to attain, by whatever means it can, its illegal place in it. At the same time,' said Arkady, pausing and looking at his friend, '“to get there” in their language in no way means the realization of some ideal, but merely arranging themselves in the most primi-

tive animal sense. All her women friends I have met look on life with a cynical simplicity: to sleep with a man means nothing to them. In the old days when a woman and a man went together she really gave him her heart, she united to the furthestmost limits of her being, but now they have nothing to give and they regard any union as a trivial pleasure or as a means to an end.

'And man? Man in his relation to woman is just the same. He always takes that which is easy to get, and what does he value most in woman nowadays?'

Arkady again paused and looked at his friend.

'Legs! . . . ' he said, after a short silence. 'He does not look at the face, at the eyes, or at the soul, but at the legs.

'Yes, it is terrible, and so you will understand how it tortures me to think that some blackguard will turn up for whom it will be just "a trifling pleasure" to despise what is for me most sacred. I am glad that she has as male society this descent Uncle Misha and Levotchka, who stand between her and various ne'er-do-wells, though she is certainly protected by the love she bears towards me; but what frightens me is the absence of spiritual inner life in her, she cannot remain a moment by herself, she continually seeks for external stimulants, she is always wanting to go somewhere. At home she is not a housewife, she sleeps until ten o'clock. I have to make the coffee myself. At the same time she is oppressed and annoyed with poverty, at the impossibility of having silk stockings, as is the fashion. She is an egoist; with those she likes she is nice and kind, the others do not exist for her. What particularly perturbs me is that she has a great sexual curiosity. . . . Now it has started to rain,' said Arkady, approaching the window, outside which the rain was falling heavily on the trees.

'But what saves her is her innocence, a sort of childish *naïveté*, which in her is combined with a full knowledge of the physical relationship,' added Arkady.

Suddenly he pricked up his ears and looked in the direction of the door, and with relief:

'Now there she is, thank God! Come in, come in, you are very late,' said he, opening the door.

XIX

ON THE THRESHOLD APPEARED A TALL GIRL WITH A WHITE FACE and full lips.

'I am quite wet,' she exclaimed, laughing. She immediately saw the presence of a stranger in the room, and though she had not yet greeted him, it was clear that her animation was related in a greater degree to the presence of a guest about whom she had heard a great deal from her husband and with whom she would in the near future be intimately acquainted, than to the fact that she was wet through.

'I am not alone,' said Tamara. 'I ran into Uncle Misha in the street, just as it began to rain, and he brought me home in a taxi, like one of the rich. We only got wet as we ran to the doorway here.'

'Come in, come in,' cried Arkady, and he became uncommonly fussy and went out into the corridor to bring his friend in. Then he rushed to help his wife to take her things off.

'Don't, don't,' exclaimed Tamara. 'You will get wet.'

Shaking her head, she took the hat from her very fair hair, which was cropped closely in the fashionable style, and gripping her short skirt between her knees, she began to shake the hat in front of her on the mat.

Her companion was a tall, broad-chested man, in a blue shirt fastened with a belt. He greeted Arkady, but refused to come in, saying that he was in a hurry.

'I brought her home safely and now I must go,' said he.

'A most excellent fellow,' said Arkady to Kisiakof when Uncle Misha had gone.

Arkady's exuberance was probably due to his wife's return and the fact that she was about to become acquainted with his friend. He had not yet introduced them and hovered about her helping her to take off the blue jacket. She remained in an open-necked white blouse and a blue skirt which scarcely reached her knees.

'Now introduce yourselves,' said Arkady, glancing from his wife to his friend, as if there was already some bond of relationship between them.

Tamara looked for the first time at the visitor, and extended to him her hand, which was as large as a man's and had well-polished nails. She seemed to lean backward. Her exuberant tone disappeared and for a few seconds she looked with an open unconfused glance into Kisiakof's eyes.

The exceptional whiteness of her face was most striking, it

accentuated the fullness of her lips, which became still more red and moist as she hurriedly passed the tip of her tongue over them.

As with the photograph, the first thing on which Kisliakof's eyes rested was her legs and the thin silk stockings; as in the snapshot they were very full and round at the knees, especially when she sat down and drew her short skirt over them.

'In practically a moment we were soaked by the rain,' said Tamara. 'Now I will get tea ready at once. You want some tea?'

'Don't ask, but get on with it,' exclaimed Arkady with simulated severity, as if trying to boast before Kisliakof of how he treated his handsome wife.

'I will, I will,' she cried in turn, and obediently she hurried into the other room, but in closing the door she found time to glance at Kisliakof, not with the formal smile which she had given him while talking, but as a woman who wants to take a good look at a man whom she will often have to meet.

Left to themselves the friends were silent and seemed as though they did not know what to talk about, as though the whole atmosphere of the room had suddenly changed. It seemed that something entirely new had entered and had attracted all their attention, leaving them no room for their mutual interests. However much Arkady tried to make it appear that he resumed their interrupted talk, it was clear that the thread had been broken. He paced agitatedly about the room, rubbing his hands and saying from time to time:

'Such is life, such is life. . . .'

Although it was obvious that he was excited as regards the impression his wife made on his friend, he purposely maintained an unconcerned expression, as if to make it appear that he did not even think about it.

He stood by the window with his back to Kisliakof, shaking his head at the rain which beat upon the panes and flowed down in streams.

'I must say you are to be envied,' said Kisliakof, sensing that his friend was waiting to hear an opinion.

With beaming face, Arkady turned quickly from the window:

'You are really favourably impressed?'

'A remarkable woman,' said Kisliakof, knowing that Arkady would be sure to tell Tamara what he said, and he tried to say something original and exceptionally pleasant about her which would make her, as a woman, take an interest in him.

'Her eyes, they are the naive, innocent eyes of a child, and the lips and lower part of the face give the impression of a woman of great passion: restless, changeable and ambitious, but this per-

haps will never realize itself, because over everything her *naïveté*, which is innocent of all evil, predominates.'

Arkady, who awaited the end of his friend's words with an impatient, gratified expression, clapped him vigorously on the shoulder and said:

'A most wonderful appreciation! Just *naïveté*, which knows no evil. A child, just a child, stupid and often capricious, that is what she is. You have summed her up splendidly.'

He even moved as though to run to the room where Tamara was.

'Only you must not tell her,' said Kisliakof.

'Why?'

'Well, it isn't necessary.'

'Very well then . . .' said Arkady, and Kisliakof could tell by the expression on his face that he certainly would tell her.

'And what a wonderful figure! What hands! In them one senses the woman and at the same time almost a man's strength.'

Actually, he ought to have said that what had impressed him most was her legs, legs and hips, but it was impossible to say this to a husband who was also his friend.

Tamara went out of the bedroom into the corridor, where the communal kitchen was, then returning, she seated herself at the table and watched Arkady, who continued to pace the room.

Kisliakof noticed that when she watched from any distance she half closed her eyes short-sightedly, and that this became her very well, although she tried to conceal her short-sightedness.

'I had better put the tea in,' said Arkady and he poured some tea from a packet into the glass caddy.

Kisliakof got the impression that in spite of the encouraging remarks of Arkady, Tamara did not know how to keep house. She sat at the table and did not even show any inclination to gather up the playing cards which were scattered about, nor the scissors and a glove which were lying there, as if it did not concern her.

Then, when the samovar had been brought in, Arkady made the tea and handed the cups to Tamara. She remained sitting where she was and took them from him.

'Now what about your work?' said Arkady to his wife. 'Is there any hope?'

A grimace of pain passed over Tamara's quiet face.

'I sat at that terrible exchange for five hours. Musia introduced me to several producers; they all promised, but said not at present. Musia wants to introduce me to another, a foreigner, who is going to Odessa to produce a film.'

'Don't let us talk about it,' she almost shrieked.

Kisliakof felt disappointed because she scarcely looked at him.

Some ordinary person, who interested her in no way, might have been sitting in the room. Perhaps Arkadys' question about her work had taken her thoughts away from the guest.

'But I am happy,' said Tamara suddenly. 'Happy because I am in Moscow. How I longed to be here! What a poor dull life we had there among the provincial intelligentsia. You cannot imagine it.'

She addressed this remark to Kisliakof.

'Among them one doesn't hear one single interesting thought, or meet one clever person. When people meet for the first time they try to make an impression by saying smart things, but later. . . .' She waved her hands with a gesture of hopelessness.

'And what about Levotchka and Uncle Misha,' said Arkady; and he added, 'outstanding personalities and excellent characters there certainly are, but generally speaking—the spine is broken.'

Tamara made no reply to Arkady's remark; she busied herself in pouring out the tea and looked short-sightedly about the table to see that everything needed was there.

'It seems to me that the weakening of the human element is a result of the tendency for the communal to predominate over the individual,' said Kisliakof. 'If personality cannot find the sustenance it needs, it loses itself and becomes nonentity, having none of its own thoughts and its own problems. Yet the whole world movement is the result, as you might say, of an anarchical and unplanned forward movement of individual personalities. The popular masses always move along the direction in which a strong personality guides them, and when personality fails they come to a full stop.'

'That is remarkably true,' said Tamara, and she glanced at Kisliakof with a look of slight astonishment.

'In some way I am not in agreement,' said Arkady, cutting the cheese. 'Looking upon individuality in such a light creates boundless pride, egoism, and a mistaken belief in one's self importance. This promotes discord and not unity among people; there is no trace of love and goodness.'

'I do not agree with you,' said Tamara, glancing quickly at Kisliakof. 'One must first build up the ego and then union with other egos will be worth while. Otherwise you get the union of nothings.' She smiled and again glanced quickly at Kisliakof, as if seeking confirmation of her words.

There was a long silence, as though she found it impossible to explain herself; probably she felt a strong intellectual excitement, her eyes were glistening and her cheeks were flushed and burning.

Kisliakof felt that his words had awakened her interest, and because of this he began to speak with an elation and animation

such as he had not had for a long time. Although he was speaking of that which for a long time had not entered his life, this did not weaken his elation; that elation being caused not by the thoughts to which he was giving expression, but by the animated attention of the woman whose gaze was directed on him.

Suddenly Arkady got up from the table, and with a mysterious gesture, approached the sideboard.

'We must celebrate our meeting in some way,' said he, taking out a bottle of spirits which he stored away. 'This is cognac.'

'How clever you are,' said Tamara. 'I did not know you had the sense.' Saying this, she got up and put her arms round Arkady's neck. Then, moving away from him, she looked at Kisliakof.

By this glance he felt that he was already considered as someone intimate, and that she was not afraid to be tender with her husband in front of him.

'My dear, let us draw the table up to the couch, it will be more comfortable like that.'

'An excellent idea.'

The men took hold of the table, on which were the samovar and crockery, and moved it over to the couch, which stood near the wall, and they fastened the cord of the electric light to a nail, so that it hung over the table.

Tamara sat on the couch and Arkady was going to put his friend next to her, but she said:

'I want you to sit near me.'

'There you are! She is just a little savage and is afraid of anyone new until she gets to know him.'

They busied themselves in opening the cognac, and discovered that they had no corkscrew. Arkady looked round for something to use instead. Kisliakof remembered his dagger and handed it to him.

Arkady's glance rested on it and as if struck by something he turned pale.

'What is the matter with you?' exclaimed Kisliakof and Tamara in one voice.

'Oh, nothing. . . . I just feel a little faint,' said Arkady, and he began to poke out the cork with the point of the dagger.

'Why did you turn so pale? Are you feeling unwell?' said Tamara.

'No, I'm all right now,' said Arkady, trying to smile.

They filled the glasses and drank to each other's health then sipped the cognac alternately with tea.

'You do not know what this means to me,' said Arkady 'Before you came in we were saying that now, when the finest

relationship between people is diminishing, the rarest thing is a friend, meaning by that a being who will under no circumstances betray you. The present generation does not understand the phrase as he and I understand it.'

Having drunk three small glasses of cognac, Tamara's cheeks became flushed and her eyes shone still more brightly.

She sat on the couch near Arkady and pressed her heated cheek to the elbow of his shirt, she was very tender with him; as her head was below his, she glanced up at him, and when he put his hand on her hair she playfully rubbed her cheek against it. At the same time her eyes were watching Kisliakof with innocent attentiveness.

'And I?' asked she.

'What about you?'

'What part do I play in your friendship?'

'You will be his sister.'

'How remarkable it is,' exclaimed Kisliakof, looking from Arkady to Tamara with shining eyes. 'You know, that was just how I imagined myself when I came here for the first time.'

'Then do please say "thou" and not "you". Be like brother and sister.'

'It is too soon; I cannot do that yet,' said Tamara, looking at Kisliakof with a smile.

'No, please oblige me by addressing him as "thou" at once,' exclaimed Arkady. He filled her glass. 'Say—"thou", Hyppolit!'

'But I cannot. I will say it, but later on.'

However, she got up and, approaching Kisliakof with the glass in her hand, she looked him straight in the eyes and said:

'I drink to my friendship with you.'

Arkady clapped and, seizing them both by the shoulders, tried to make them kiss, but Tamara jumped aside.

After this all three seated themselves on the couch and gossiped cosily. At the same time Tamara put her elbows on the table and, resting her chin on them, looked first at her husband and then at his friend.

Never before had Kisliakof experienced such an agreeable sensation.

He suddenly felt pleased by the thought that as was the due of an honest and decent man, everything would go swimmingly with them.

He thought of how he had awaited her glance when they first met, and he did not move his eyes away when she looked at him. Then, when she was squeezing herself on the couch between him

and the table, he had moved his legs, but so that she should brush her knees against his.

But he felt that even in his innermost thoughts he was quite irreproachable before his friend. They could look boldly and simply into each other's eyes, because these would only be brotherly glances.

He felt an extraordinary, fatherly rather than brotherly, tenderness towards this young girl-woman, and joy that he could address her as 'thou,' as his little sister.

Tamara went out to the kitchen for something.

Waiting until she had gone out of the door, Kisliakof addressed Arkady:

'How grateful I am to you! It is a long time since I experienced what I am feeling now.'

'Put this away,' said Arkady, handing him the dagger with which he had opened the bottle. He made no comment upon his friend's remark.

Kisliakof looked at him with astonishment.

'But what is it? . . . Why did you turn so pale? Do tell me.'

'I can't understand it myself,' said Arkady. 'I had a terrible dream last night. I returned here from somewhere at the dead of night. The door was open. In terrified loneliness a solitary candle flickered on the table. The windows were ominously dark, as happens in dreams. I suddenly felt, no, not felt, but knew,' said Arkady, with wide opened, terror-stricken eyes, 'that something awaited me in the room.' He pointed to the bedroom. 'Suddenly I saw. . . ' said he in a whisper. . . .

Kisliakof had a creeping sensation in his spine as he waited in uneasy expectation for what Arkady would say next.

'Suddenly I saw a long trail of blood from the table to the bedroom door. I rushed there and opened the door. . . . Within I saw a black curtain. The trail continued towards it. I was seized with terror. I pulled aside the curtain and saw there . . . nothing . . . emptiness! But such a terrifying emptiness as only happens in dreams. And those dark windows and the guttering candle in the other room. . . .' continued Arkady in terror. 'I seized this candle, searched in every corner, moved the large walnut arm-chair, and under it I saw . . . just this dagger. . . .' said he in a low voice. At the same time Kisliakof turned pale at such an unexpected ending.

'But perhaps you saw in your dream any Caucasian dagger; they are all very much alike.'

'No, I am certain it was just this one!' said Arkady in terror. 'The same monogram, the same broken ornament. . . .' With

a superstitious fright Arkady pointed to the ornament. How does this coincidence come about when I have seen it for the first time to-day?’

Kisliakof began to cast his mind back, but in his excitement he could not remember whether Arkady had seen the dagger before or not.

Tamara entered the room.

At once they both became silent.

‘Why have you both such strange faces?’ asked she in astonishment.

‘Why? . . . nothing. . . .’ muttered Arkady, and when she went into the bedroom he whispered to Kisliakof:

‘Do not tell her, or she, like all superstitious women, will be upset.’

XX

HYPPOLIT KISLIAKOF RETURNED FROM ARKADY'S FLAT FILLED WITH emotion and brightened by a new and unexpected feeling. He noticed with pleasure that the corridor was unusually clean. The next day he learned that it was his turn for duty.

He had an instinctive loathing for any communal work, for house meetings, elections and re-elections, as for something demeaning, and if he had to go and fight to hold his room against the covetousness of the neighbours, or to give any sort of explanation to the managers of the house, he felt really ill. Because of this, and having missed all the meetings, he only got second-hand information of the decisions taken there.

So it now happened. In the morning, instead of working on the scheme of reorganization, he had to clean the kitchen, lavatory and corridor.

It seemed to him that all the tenants would come out of their rooms to see how he, the individual with fastidious personal tastes, would handle the brush and wash out the water closet. He took the brush and began to sweep the corridor. On his face was a disdainful grin and there was a laconic expression about his movements, assumed in case anyone should come out and find him, a man of the educated class, doing such work.

Contrary to his expectation, the tenants did not look out of their rooms to view his performance, and nobody laughed at him, and the wife of the locksmith, passing to the kitchen and noticing how he was wringing out the floorcloth, said to him:

'You ought to cover yourself up, otherwise you will spoil your good trousers. Wait a minute, I have a sack which you can fasten round you with your belt and use instead of an apron.'

She said this so naturally and seriously, without any sneer, that out of gratitude for such attention he felt that he could not refuse her advice.

She brought the sack and herself fastened it under his belt, and Kisliakof, raising his elbows, only turned round in the middle of the kitchen, as though he was at a fashionable tailor's trying on a new suit.

'And you must wring the floorcloth out like this, said the locksmith's wife when he squeezed it in his hands over the sink.

She took the floorcloth out of his hands and, grasping her skirts between her knees, twisted it and squeezed the water out.

Kisliakof thanked her warmly.

While he was sweeping the corridor and dusting the kitchen he

could continue to grin with the disdain of a gentleman who was not used to such dirty work, but when it came to the business of the lavatory he ceased grinning and, locking himself in, began to work. But he forgot to bolt the door.

The handsome lady, who went about in the morning in a lilac shawl, hurried down the corridor as if trying to hide herself from prying eyes and opened the door of the bathroom with a bang, pushing it into Kisliakof's back. He, with the sack round his waist, was stooping over the bucket to wet his floorcloth.

The lady shrieked with fright and his pince-nez fell from his nose into the bucket. He blushed to the roots of his hair.

'Run away, run away from here,' he was saying to himself. 'He, a personality, a unique personality, obliged to clean up after some vulgar lower middle class woman.'

'I can understand most things, but when my dignity! . . .' he suddenly exclaimed aloud, but recollecting himself he became silent, as someone approached the door, and, probably astonished at this pathetic exclamation, began to knock and ask who was there and what was the matter.

Kisliakof crouched silently where he was, with the floorcloth in his hand, not daring to move and betray his presence there. It would really have made a fine picture—a man of the educated class, crouching in the lavatory with floorcloth in his hand and a sack round his waist, shouting out about something.

Having finished the cleaning, he peeped cautiously out of the bathroom, and, seeing that the corridor was empty, he threw the bucket into the kitchen and rushed into his room.

The wife of the professor, with her old-fashioned style of hair-dress and pince-nez on her nose, glanced at him with astonishment on meeting him and quietly asked:

'What is the matter with you?'

Kisliakof, thinking that probably his expression had changed so greatly after his humiliating work, said:

'When your dignity. . .'

Then suddenly seeing the sack round his waist he realized that he had forgotten to take it off, and without another word he darted into his room.

XXI

AS HE ENTERED THE DOOR HE FELT THAT HE PUT HIS FOOT ON something, and looking down, he saw a letter on the floor. It was the practice, when tenants were not in their rooms, for letters to be pushed under the door. Probably, while he had been working in the bathroom someone had been looking for him. His room was not locked; that meant that he was not out.

As was to be expected, the letter was from Elena Victorovna. She wrote to say that the separation made her feel, as she had never felt before, how much she loved him and how hard she felt it was to be away from his side.

As usual, Kisliakof glanced quickly over the letter, looking for something of importance, agreeable or disagreeable, some commissions or instructions.

Further in the letter Elena Victorovna mentioned the position of poor Madame Zvenigorodsky; she expressed her opinion of the wild licentiousness of men, and of their complete moral collapse. At the same time she asked him to ascertain whether Zvenigorodsky was selling her things, because for two days she had had disturbing premonitions. How well she knew, had it not been often proved, what a remarkable sense of premonition she had.

Kisliakof glanced over these sentences quickly, merely thinking that here was a woman who had completed the highest education open to women, who had studied philosophy and natural science, speaking about premonitions.

In conclusion she again wrote about her feelings and said how lonely she was without him, and in addition how terrible the town was. People crowding everywhere—in the forest, on the grass, what litter they made, and in the evenings sang wild songs and played concertinas. It would have been better for her health and her liver if she had gone to Essentuki instead of wasting money at this resort. She even had to sleep with closed windows.

'You'd like to go abroad, wouldn't you?' exclaimed Kisliakof, unable to control himself.

The last sentence in the letter forced him to screw it up angrily and throw it into a corner.

This sentence contained a warning against spending too much money, 'otherwise you will waste half of it and not know where it has gone.'

A fine state of affairs! She is resting, breathes pure air (she never has enough air), and I have to stay here and wash lavatories, and she advises me to be more economical in spending the money,

a miserable hundred roubles which has to last me a whole month, and then my absent-mindedness, due to which I shall not know how I've spent the money. . . .

'There are plenty of ways of spending without absent-mindedness,' said Kisliakof aloud, pacing the room excitedly. He had, in fact, been thinking for some time that he must invite Arkady and his wife to sup with him at a restaurant, even that he must order a bottle of champagne, as he remembered Tamara's exclamation that Uncle Misha had brought her home 'handsomely' in a taxicab. It meant that it would give pleasure to her to go to a fine restaurant and drink expensive wine.

And what right had she to demand an account of each kopeck spent? It was not she who earned the money, but he! Was she interesting to him as a woman? Not in the least! Then why should he deprive himself on account of a woman in whom he had absolutely no interest? .

But words are words, and the necessity to answer the letter still remained; first of all because he had to calm her on the subject of her premonition, otherwise she might take it into her mind to rush home at a day's notice.

He seated himself gloomily at the table, on which, during Elena Victorovna's absence, had already accumulated a miscellaneous assortment of household ware: an unfinished glass of tea with a spoon in it and ends of cigarettes in the saucer, a clothes brush, a jar of putty, a salt cellar in which he had absent-mindedly pushed a cigarette end, and heaps of old newspapers.

It was for all the world like the room of a hotel which had not been cleaned after the departure of one guest and had been taken at a moment's notice by another.

In theory Kisliakof was a man of refined taste and at the first glance in another person's flat he noticed any upholstery which was in bad taste, if the dining table was covered with oilcloth instead of a tablecloth (oilcloth always offended his eye as a symbol of lower middle class mediocrity); but in practice, that is, when he was left alone by Elena Victorovna, he was overwhelmed by chaos. Cigarette ends, slippers and trousers were the chief evils, and the second was—dirt. The pillow cases were obviously clean, but when he decided to change them he had to look about in the drawers, and then he thought that they were almost clean and that he could avoid all this trouble if he covered the pillows with anything which came to hand in the event of anyone calling on him.

He sat at the table for quite a long time. He had a sheet of paper and a post card before him. The question was which to use. The paper would mean that he would have to sit for a whole

hour trying to find something to write about, but she would be offended if he only sent her a post card after her tender letter. She might be annoyed by his offhandedness, or, what was still worse, suspect him of a cooling off. . . . This suspicion would provoke agitation, and agitation—a speedy return. It was a round of annoyances. He must write a perfectly unnecessary letter to an absolutely unnecessary woman in order to be relieved for as long as possible of her presence.

Then he decided to use the notepaper but to space the lines widely apart, so that the letter would not require much effort and would appear to be quite long.

At the same time he made a mental note that not only in the political sense, but even in his relations with his wife he was obliged to be false to himself.

He wrote that he was greatly pleased to receive her letter, because he was already becoming uneasy as he had not heard from her for such a long time. Then he went on to say how very dull and empty the place was for him without her, and that if it had not been his wish that she should get as much fresh air as possible and improve her health, he would have gone to bring her back. He also said that he had been to see Arkady, who was wrapped up in his love for his wife, which made the visit a very dull affair. Poor Zvenigorodsky, he said, was walking about like a ghost: pale, with a vacant unseeing look in her eyes. She had taken her husband to court. He would make immediate inquiry about the things. Then he again mentioned his love. After this he sat for a long time with the pen poised over the paper, staring at the window, as scholars stare on a hot summer day when solving a difficult arithmetical problem.

At the time when his work, his purpose in life, filled his entire being, his wife had been his foremost confidante; he had told her of all his plans. Whenever he had some good idea he waited for her with impatience in order that he could ask her opinion about it, and then renewed his activities with double energy if he received her approval. It was as though she entered into his private laboratory and with an unprejudiced outlook was able to put him right when the step he proposed taking was not the right one. She studied higher mathematics on purpose to do this and often completed some of his calculations when he became tired after a prolonged effort and left his work unfinished. Under his direction she herself completed the plans which he did not wish anyone else to see.

She surrounded him with such attention and care that he had no need to worry about anything else when he was working; even when she was several rooms away (they had a very large flat) she

went about on tiptoe, and she felt herself to be an immensely happy woman that she could be sharing the life of such a useful man.

But from the time when he gave up his real work and took on the counterfeit, when he began merely to *earn his daily bread*, there came a strange, elusive, undefinable change in the relations between his wife and himself. Her previous watchful attention disappeared. She always entered the room noisily, as if knowing that he was not occupied with his work, as before, and that she could make a noise, walk about and do just what she liked.

She often said, thoughtlessly, and almost in a tone of irritation: 'Run down to the shop, you are not doing anything.'

This 'you are not doing anything' was for him something terrifying. If he was lying on the couch and heard his wife's footsteps in the corridor, he would jump up and sit at the writing desk, so that she should not think: 'He lounges about and does nothing.' He was even pleased when he felt feverish and ill, and made the most of his illness, so that by the right of an invalid, he might lie about as much as he wished.

Elena Victorovna, as if feeling that he himself realized the wrongness of his new life, gradually changed from an attentive, adoring wife to an ill-tempered house-keeper, as if at one stroke all her higher gifts, all the intellectual tone, were replaced by a strict and precise control of the budget.

She had an involuntary contempt of the husband whom not so long ago she had loved so well and in whom she had believed. She had not even considered him when she invited the aunt to stay and when she got the dogs. But she always liked to appear with him in public, as though to show that she was established, that she had a husband who maintained her, that they lived in comfort. This was really the essence of lower middle class life, and in order to avoid rows he himself accompanied Elena Victorovna on her Sunday walks and stopped with her to gossip to friends. He felt that from the moment his real work stopped all the ties which united him with his wife had snapped; often, in despair, he thought that his personality had perished and he suddenly arrived at a conclusion at which he himself was surprised: Once everything had perished for him and there remained only the pitiful humdrum everyday life, without *purpose*, then *nothing mattered*, he had the right to do what he pleased.

Having reached this stage, Elena Victorovna appeared to him as a hindrance. When he thought about her his thoughts were only that with the money which he spent on her he could have had frequent and interesting adventures with young and handsome women; in any case there would have been pleasure in that, and what had he here? To all this was added the thought that she

held him in no esteem, that she did not love him and probably only regarded him as a means of obtaining money. He occasionally followed her with his eyes, and when she appeared tender he answered her kiss, thinking that the reason was probably that she wanted to buy something for herself.

Once he saw her bank book and against his will he was conscious of the disgusting thought which flashed through his mind: 'Why didn't she deposit the money in my name? And why was the gold watch which she had given to him in the early days of their married life kept locked up in her desk?'

At the same time, he was struck by the depths to which he had descended, and the thoughts which came to him, a man of the educated class, about his life partner. But perhaps I am no longer a man of the educated class but a commoner of the lowest order? Perhaps, having lost my real link with life, I have no real inner value? Then what do I represent now? Am I, in the panorama of the universe, the tragic hero who has been overwhelmed by force—or, perhaps, something else?

It was no use thinking about this; his thoughts were now about how, without interfering with his honesty, to exist, even as a *cheat*; the question of whether he would get the wreath of a heroic martyr was already one of the past.

His thoughts returned at last to the letter, and he sealed it up and left the table.

Before leaving for work, he put his hand out of the window to see what the weather was like. If it was cold he could put on his heavy overcoat, which was quite decent, but if it was warm he would be obliged to wear the light one with the stitches in the back.

It proved to be fairly warm outside, and Kisliakof took his hat and, after pondering for a moment, threw the overcoat over his arm, deciding that even though he felt cold he would at any rate be decently dressed as he walked along the street.

Opening the door, he was transfixed with horror by the sight which met his eyes across the corridor. He grasped immediately the meaning of the paint over which he had stumbled a few days previously.

Kisliakof, although he had had a higher education and had studied natural science, was nevertheless superstitious. For instance, he was quite accustomed to expect that when something unpleasant occurred, it would invariably be followed by a second, third, or even fourth calamity. Troubles never came singly.

The first disagreeable thing—his unexpected turn on duty—had already happened, bringing the crawling about with the sack round him in the lavatory; the second could be considered as the

receipt of his wife's letter, and the third, on the wall before him he saw a sheet of paper, daubed in colours with a crude picture such as one sees on the cover of humorous papers. From the whole circumstances he grasped that the painting had a definite connection with himself: it depicted a room in which was a table loaded with such a great quantity of wine as would only be consumed at a party, and in the midst of what appeared to be a guests sat he, Kisliakof (this he gathered from the wording underneath), with a bottle tipped up to his mouth. Below was another caricature of himself in the corridor, with hair dishevelled (Kisliakof at once remarked to himself that there was no resemblance, as his hair was considerably shorter), again with a bottle in his hand, and near the bathroom appeared the figure of a woman.

The meaning was clear.

Kisliakof had no time to think; he had already seized this work of art, had torn it from the wall and trampled it underfoot.

XXII

EVEN A BLIND PERSON COULD HAVE SEEN THAT THIS WAS THE WORK of children. It was a real trial. There were in all nine of them in the flat, eight were children of the working class and the ninth, a freckled, carrotty haired lad, with protruding ears, was the son of the lower middle class woman.

During summer things were more or less all right, as from early morning they were out in the yard, ran about after the dogs, dug in the sand and deafened the tenants with their various games. The yard, surrounded with houses, resounded with their shrieks and yells, and the windows had all to be kept closed. There was nothing to drown this rushing about and yelling, and from time to time someone would open a window and shriek: 'May your throats burst, you young devil!' and, banging the window, disappear again. It was much worse during winter and in wet weather, because all nine stayed indoors, fussing about in the kitchen and poking their noses everywhere. There was no escaping them; whatever one found to do, there they stood in a circle, looking on in silence. It did not matter to them what was happening: sometimes it was the knife sharpener putting an edge on the knives, the putting of the window frames, or some repair to the electrical fittings. If something was happening in the room of one of the tenants, or even if nothing was happening and the door happened to have been left open in order to clear the smoke, they at once appeared outside and looked on in silence.

When asked what they wanted they made no reply, but continued to stand there, and if anyone tried to push them out of the way they at once ran off to complain to their mothers. The worst in this respect was the son of the lower middle class woman.

For this reason most of the tenants kept their doors closed.

If one of the tenants only went to the bathroom to wash his hands and left the door open, two or three attendant shadows at once appeared on the threshold. They knew absolutely everything that went on in the flat and there was no retreat from them.

They had no place of their own and, therefore, in the winter and during the autumn evenings they occupied the far end of the corridor, exactly opposite the door of the previous owner, Sophia Pavlovna Diakonova. They raised such clouds of dust there as one might see in a riding school; they had no organized occupation and each did just what he pleased: one would chip up a piece of firewood with a knife, another would be pasting together

a cardboard box, a third, mounted on a stick, would be whipping himself as he rushed about.

If one of the tenants spilled some water in the corridor, without losing a moment they would slide, and went along it as far as they could, sliding on their heels and balancing with outstretched hands.

They had very clearly defined ideas of class distinction and everything which in the slightest degree savoured of non-proletarianism was spotted by them at once. They disliked Sophia Pavlovna above everyone else, because she was the former owner of the flat and went about in an old-fashioned hat trimmed with flowers. They always whistled after her and threw potato peelings in her path to make her slip. Once they cut off the whiskers of her cat, which made him hide for two days in the rafters, and when he re-appeared, shaved like a subaltern, the children almost collapsed with laughter as they looked at him.

They even distinguished between the dogs, with which they had, on the whole, friendly relations. Dogs of various breeds and shades gathered round them in the yard. Some had long, tangled hair. With these they had simple, friendly relationships. When free they were always willing to run about with these unexact-ing mongrels, who from their birth had never experienced the restraint of ribbons or leashes. But with dogs which ran about with ribbons and bows on their necks, like aristocrats, they waged a continuous and merciless warfare.

Therefore, in the winter there was always the continuous barking of dogs in the flat. The children did not allow a single one to pass without teasing it to death.

The legal position was rather weak, chiefly because these nine individuals were united only by their inner territory and had no internal organization. Each one answered for himself, and when any one of them was flogged or removed by the ear from the place of his crime, the others looked on in silence, and if they remembered some old unsettled account, even with rejoicing.

Many tenants took this into account and acted on the principle of divide and rule. In other words, if they boxed one over the ears then they bribed another with sweets, and they responded to this treatment.

In this lay the chief sin and weakness of this unorganized society of nine individuals.

But at the end of the summer a young scout of military bearing came to live in the flat opposite the landing; he was only twelve, but went about in a blue exercise shirt and a red tie and turned down collar. He certainly had an organizing ability, and

having become acquainted with the occupants of Flat No. 6, he immediately welded the separate individuals into one whole.

They became known as the 'Budenny Detachment.'*

The name occurred to them one day when, astride on sticks, they were storming a rather strongly fortified position of White Guards near the refuse heaps in the yard.

From that moment the occupants of Flat No. 6 began to understand what organization meant.

The first to experience it was Hyppolit Kisliakof, who knew nothing about the start of this new social movement, the Budenny Detachment, and furthermore did not visualize its future developments.

* After General Eudenny, Red cavalry leader in the revolution.—(Ed.)

XXIII

THE SCHEME FOR THE REORGANIZATION OF THE MUSEUM ADVANCED quickly. Kisliakof went to his work when he liked and scarcely ever went to his own department, but visited the various halls and studied the exhibits, classifying them according to his own ideas.

Once, after visiting the halls and having made a list of the exhibits which he required, he entered the study of Polukhin.

He had no special business there, nor was there anything for which he wished to see Polukhin, but he often visited the director's study nowadays, so as not to be out of his sight too long, in case Polukhin should forget about him and the scheme for reorganization and entrust it to someone else. Each such visit also advanced their intimacy and evoked an agreeable feeling of the realization of some privilege in his position. Not everyone could enter the study just when he wished without being announced.

Kisliakof half opened the door. The study was full of tobacco smoke, and a number of people, who argued warmly about something, were seated there. Polukhin was pacing the floor, ruffling his hair, and sometimes, when he reached the end of the room, he would make a large stride and bring his foot to the edge of the parquet flooring. Occasionally he stopped and blurted out something to the others.

'Do listen to what I am telling you. Shut up!' cried he to someone who was speaking and would not listen to him. At Kisliakof's entrance Polukhin looked round absent-mindedly and even with annoyance at the noise of the door, and without returning the bow, he continued to argue and pace the room, pointing with his index finger as was his habit.

'You are engaged? Shall I come in later?' asked Kisliakof with a sudden feeling of shyness when several people looked round at him. He said this in the hope that Polukhin would say: 'Sit down, you are one of us.'

But Polukhin said nothing, did not even answer him, and, turning away, continued his argument with added vigour.

Kisliakof closed the door and began to pace the corridor.

He was annoyed that he should have to retire from the study like an intruder, that his bow was not even answered and his question ignored, ignored in quite a vulgar way, and he, a man of the educated class, had, like some minor subordinate under the old

regime, to withdraw without even having the opportunity of telling these people that it is humiliating for him to have to bow to their backs and not receive an answer to his question.

For this reason his relationship with Polukhin was sometimes difficult, chiefly because there was a weakness in these relationships which probably Polukhin did not sense at all, but which was felt keenly by Hyppolit Kisliakof. The weakness was that after all Polukhin was the chief and Kisliakof the subordinate.

Peculiar to every chief and busy man is a change of mood. One day he will meet you with pleasure and ask you why you have not been to see him for such a long time.

A brilliant idea comes to him and he wishes to discuss it with the one in whom he has been used to confide.

Another day he scarcely acknowledges you: his forehead is wrinkled, his face wears the stamp of preoccupation and tiredness, and gives the impression that he would be glad if everybody round about him would disappear from the face of the earth and leave him to breathe in peace.

A subordinate coming in contact with such a mood in his chief feels as though he has been plunged into cold water and begins to wonder what it can mean. His first thought is that someone has certainly been gossiping about him, or that he himself has said something out of place during their open-hearted talk at a previous meeting. How many times has he told himself that he must watch what he says to a party man, as friendship takes second place with him in certain matters, and in any case he remembers everything and nothing escapes him.

But if others gossiped about him what could they say? Had he talked too freely with someone and blurted something out in the presence of non-party men? How many times he had told himself that once he had become intimate with people of the party, how necessary it was to be especially guarded in his behaviour with non-party individuals.

Then the subordinate tries to get back into the good graces of his chief: he talks about things which will most easily interest him, but even this does not affect him.

Like a child who will not play with the toys which he likes most and consequently worries his parents, so the chief worries his protégé. In the same way Polukhin worried Kisliakof when he was worried and absent-minded, but in such cases Kisliakof was not worried about Polukhin but about himself.

When Kisliakof was talking to Polukhin he would observe that there was all the time something unnatural in his tone and movements; he would hurry, speak too animatedly, much more animatedly than he really felt and than the subject demanded, and

he himself would realize his affectation, would think that Polukhin also probably noticed it, that it was not without reason that he had become inattentive and absent-minded. This would increase his affectation and uneasiness, and also the humiliation of their inequality, which cannot even be mentioned. It is already humiliating that there are a lot of things about which one cannot talk with a friend, because he is a Communist, and one must pretend that one is in agreement with him in everything.

One peculiar trait in Polukhin annoyed him above everything else. It was his habit of lapsing into thought in the middle of a most animated discussion, when Kisliakof was pleased with his own easy and natural expressiveness and Polukhin suddenly appeared to drop out of the conversation and look around with a vague expression which left Kisliakof suspended alone in the air with his animation and lively tone. He did not know whether he was being listened to, or whether he should continue talking on the same subject or not. It seemed stupid and uncomfortable for him to continue, he felt like an actor performing before an empty theatre, but if he became silent his companion might take offence.

In addition the fear crept in that perhaps he had annoyed Polukhin with some too exalted thought, perhaps Polukhin even regretted his intimacy with him.

He was in this uneasy mood when he left the study and began to pace the corridor.

He paced up and down and began to consider all his previous meetings with Polukhin at which anything of the sort might have happened.

Having at last decided that there had been nothing, and feeling humiliated, he decided that he would not go in to see Polukhin again, but would go home.

He was already descending the staircase when Polukhin followed him. He was in a rubber-proofed coat and tall boots, and carried a portfolio.

'Are you going home, Comrade Kisliakof?'

He said this in a gay tone; probably he was in a good mood.

Kisliakof's first feeling was one of joy that everything was all right and he answered quietly:

'Yes, I must go.'

He himself was pleased with the quiet assurance of his reply. Not only need he not be shy with the director, but he could be on the same footing with him, because he was not performing 'important work'—the reorganization scheme—and might be considered the closest and only adviser of Polukhin.

He had even to exercise some control over himself to maintain

this quiet and comradelike tone, as with every word he spoke he experienced a sensation of inner joy that he had found a mutual way of expression with a man of whom a week ago he had been afraid, and whom he hated as being an instrument for his own destruction. Just now he had been trying to recollect whether something had happened, but this meant that there had been nothing.

Here was the enemy walking along with him and he, Kisliakof, was talking naturally with him, with no trace of inferiority, even with a shade of influence over Polukhin, who recognized in him the privileges of a man who was well-educated and working for the same ends as himself, and only needed a hint to understand every new idea.

'Now, how is the scheme progressing?' asked Polukhin, turning towards his companion.

'It progresses,' answered Kisliakof. 'I could never have expected it would fill me with such enthusiasm.'

'That's a smart fellow. Excellent. Now, my friend, we shall develop. . . . Look . . . ' exclaimed Polukhin and he stopped.

They were passing a large house which was in process of erection. A crane was hoisting a load of bricks.

'Do you realize how everything is being built up? I was in the south this summer, and what they are doing there is enough to make your head go round. And here we are protecting tombstones and Tsars' beds. Now do you get me?'

'I understand,' said Kisliakof, his composure becoming more definite as Polukhin addressed him as 'thou.'

'Get out of my way. Why are you hanging about there?' shouted a carter, who was leading a long line of lorries bringing iron girders for the building.

'Go on, my friend, go on,' said Polukhin, moving aside and in no way offended by the outburst, and he added: 'What strength. . . . Only we must get out of the clutches of the peasants and knock their desire for possession and grabbing instincts out of them.'

For a time he looked in silence at the building and shook his head.

'If we can only hold out this year, then we will organize our grain factories and get youth there. Then we can change our tune.'

'I would have cleared out all this scum,' added he, clenching his fist. 'We shall have plenty of our own people, new fellows are growing up in the country, they will be the ones to build for. Now let us go.'

As they walked Polukhin continued:

'I was looking at the scheme for the Five Years' Plan. I was amazed to see the progress which is being made. Where there is now a swamp, in three or five years' time we shall have electric lamps; machines like that will be working there,' said he, pointing to a machine which was rolling out newly laid asphalt.

'And now our business is to keep pace with the general reconstruction and, as on the chart, to register what is done. The past is only needed so that we can show from where we started and the path we have followed through history. Is that right or not?' said he, turning towards Kisliakof as they walked along.

'Certainly; quite right.'

'Yes, upon my oath it is . . .' said Polukhin excitedly, clenching his fist.

The more animated Polukhin became and the more he talked, the quieter was Kisliakof's tone. At such times Polukhin addressed him as 'thou', as an equal and as a close comrade, and Kisliakof could not help trying to maintain his composure and show that he was one of them and that Polukhin's relations towards him were quite natural, that there was no need for him to hurry to signify his agreements, which was taken for granted.

At the corner of the street Polukhin saw a man selling busts of Lenin and Marx.

'Let us buy,' said he.

'Yes, I really ought to, as I haven't got one,' agreed Kisliakof.

They each bought a bust of Karl Marx.

'It will be easier for you to work if you have him standing before you on the table,' said Polukhin.

'I am working quite well now,' said Kisliakof. 'Do you know how the present work differs from that in the days when there were superiors?'

'How?'

'In the old days you always had the feeling that you were before a superior: there was all the time a sort of fear in the subordinates, a trembling as before some higher being, and now, you see, I go about with you, like good comrades, without fear—and still you are the director.'

'And I bet the work gets on better,' said Polukhin.

'What is there to say; can one compare?'

They went out towards the quay. Polukhin stopped again.

'There is another job,' said he, pointing towards a huge building which was being built for the Sovnarkom. Surrounded with scaffolding, it towered over the low, flat bank of the right side of the river Moscow, over-shadowing the old Kremlin as though threatening it. What a position, what a position they have chosen,

the beggars. When I looked at it at first I cursed them inwardly, but now I see—it is work. It is giving a lead to everything behind the river; where, if you looked before, there were waste spaces and small houses there is now this, something of the first magnitude, which fills the whole picture. Don't you agree?' said he, turning towards Kisliakof.

The latter screwed up his eyes and began to look, as though wishing to verify the impression, then he said:

'Of course I agree. Somehow I never thought of it before.' It pleased him that in some way he, a man of taste and education, could show that he had not noticed something which Polukhin had.

'Yes, my friend, you see I know what is what,' said Polukhin.

They walked along. Polukhin was silent for some time, then he said:

'Wait a bit, we will change the whole picture. We shall soon leave the centre and go further afield, creating new centres on the outskirts.'

'What times. Ah!' exclaimed he. 'Our grandfathers could not even have dreamed of such things. But, speaking truthfully, we have started off well, first one thing then another, but just look out, perhaps we shall have nothing to eat soon. Even my old woman is always grumbling. But everything depends on the youth. Youth will work on an empty belly if it can see the end in view. Yes by God!'

'Let us go and have a drink,' said he, looking round. 'Our fellows must not see us.'

They entered the bar. It was nearly empty; there were only two fellows, who looked like dockers, sitting in a corner, under an artificial palm, with full glasses in front of them.

Polukhin looked round and sat in the opposite corner. He threw his cap on the table and pointed to a chair for Kisliakof.

'Now, this ought to have been stopped', said he, drinking half a glass of beer at one gulp and shaking his head.

'Why, are you doing too much of it?' asked Kisliakof. He unconsciously addressed him as 'thou', and in doing it he even felt his heart jump with satisfaction and excitement.

'There is a bit too much of it,' said Polukhin, nodding as he wiped his mouth.

He leaned with his two elbows on the table, and probably developing his first line of thought, said:

'And to think that this'—(with a sweeping gesture he pointed towards the window, through which they could see the growing building of the Sovnarkom)—'this is not understood by one of your colleagues.'

Kisliakof did not reply, as if he did not consider it necessary to speak about his colleagues in their absence. He merely sipped his beer, looking, with half-closed eyes behind his pince-nez, through the window, as if thinking of the meaning of the words which Polukhin had uttered.

'And I'll tell you something else. They hate all this.' He again waved his hand in the direction of the window. 'They hate it because we disturb them, shake them, don't let them stand still but drag them into the general scramble. We must drag everybody into it and not let anyone shut himself up in a study for the "good of science." We need now a special science and there certainly are some who can be changed, but most of them. . . .' He did not finish the sentence but waved his hand. . . . 'We ought to get what we can out of them, then. . . . I do not trust one of them,' exclaimed he. 'Now, I trusted you,' said he, 'from all the others, because although you are a man of the educated class you are able to understand. I felt this from our first talk. Do you remember?'

Kisliakof silently nodded his head and continued to gaze thoughtfully through the window, as if there was nothing unexpected in what Polukhin was saying.

'Now, I trust you and know that you are one of us, and they . . . just rabble.'

At these last words Kisliakof felt what soldiers probably feel when they receive a high decoration in the field. Although he continued to sit in the same comfortable position, there suddenly sprang up within him a fresh wave of warm attachment and love for Polukhin. His legs seemed to have stepped across from the other bank, on which were his colleagues, people like Andrey Ignatich, Marya Pavlovna and all the others, who were now doomed to destruction, having been unable to enter into the new scheme of things. He even felt vaguely that Elena Victorovna, not of her own fault, let it be said, remained on the other bank.

In order not to be silent and at the same time being scarcely able to control the feeling of joy and gratitude which he felt towards Polukhin for his appreciation of him, Kisliakof said:

'Nevertheless, an important reconstruction is needed here.'

'And who says not?'

'I must tell you that before I met you I felt myself to be a spineless member of the educated class'—he emphasized these words disparagingly—'afraid of work and physical inconveniences and when you Bolsheviks took us in hand I ceased to be helpless and indolent, and now I can do everything for myself. I wash the floor myself, clean out the lavatory; nothing frightens me now.'

'Yes, but all this has to be understood. You understand it; the

others don't. They only become annoyed,' exclaimed Polukhin, as though Kisliakof under-estimated his own value.

'It was the same with me at first,' said Kisliakof, as if he still did not wish to give in and admit that there was merit in what he did.

'At first. But I am speaking about what is now. What is the use of speaking about what happened at first.'

'Perhaps that is so. I will tell you about myself,' said Kisliakof, feeling an uncontrollable impulse of frankness from the beer which he had drunk and from the appreciation of Polukhin, who regarded him as one of themselves. This comradelike impulse even gave him a tickling sensation in his spine.

'I must say about myself that I often experienced a feeling of displeasure, and even anger, against a man who is strange to me—I told you about it before—but one day you gave me a pat on the back and I suddenly understood something which I had not understood before and began to like you very sincerely. I am telling you all this without any pretence,' and, as if in excitement, he took off his pince-nez and put them on the table.

Polukhin made a movement with his hand as if to say that he needed no convincing but understood all this himself.

'And I will tell you,' continued Kisliakof, putting his pince-nez on again and feeling stronger and stronger, 'I must tell you that I have worked with them for eight years and they are more strange to me than you are. I never feel so much at ease with them as I am just now with you. All the time we have an official attitude towards each other and observe all sorts of Chinese ceremonials.'

'Upper class tendencies——'

'Yes, call it what you like. Of freedom, frankness, intimacy we have nothing, and it is just that which makes me see that you Communists bring into life a unity and simplicity which were unknown to the old intelligentsia.'

'Ah—ah,' said Polukhin, looking at his wrist watch. 'I have dawdled for a whole hour. Let us go to my place and have a snack. Then I must go to the university.'

XXIV

POLUKHIN OCCUPIED A LOW-CEILINGED BUT RATHER SPACIOUS room, separated by a wooden partition from his neighbour's room. This partition did not reach the ceiling and was covered with flowered wallpaper.

In one corner stood a writing desk; there were shelves of books, a narrow iron bedstead with a red cotton pillow case, and two rusty old arm-chairs, covered with dust.

In the space between the windows stood a dining table; there were pots of geraniums on the windowsill. In a corner, behind a wooden screen, was his mother's bed and a linen chest.

His mother was just about to go out, and met them on the threshold.

'Mother, have you a bite of something to eat for us. See, I have brought a visitor.'

'Oh dear me . . . in a minute, in a minute. I was beginning to think that you would not be home until late.'

She began to busy herself; took a clean table cloth from out of the sideboard and prepared the table. She was an alert old woman with a pleasant face. Her sight was probably weak, because whenever a stranger entered the room she tried to see his face in the full light.

'This is our monastery,' said Polukhin, and shaking his head, he added: 'What a curse, I have drunk one bottle and now I am longing for another one. No, my friend, it is enough.'

The line of their conversation in the bar had broken and Kisliakof did not know what to talk about.

Usually in such cases the guest, while waiting for dinner, walks about the room and busies himself in contemplating the portraits and prints hanging on the walls, and looks also at the small ornaments which are placed in different corners. Polukhin had none of these, and for this reason Kisliakof, with hands thrust in the pockets of his checked trousers, simply walked up and down the room, approached the window and looked out into the street, where heavy lorries were continuously passing up and down, shaking the walls with their weight, so that occasionally the glasses rattled on the sideboard.

But even this silence made him feel extremely comfortable; it seemed as if they were now intimate and close friends, who did not find it necessary to be all the time entertaining each other and keeping up a continuous conversation.

'Why do you wear those things? You would find it better to wear tall boots,' said Polukhin.

'I'll buy tall boots when I wear these out,' said Kisliakof, and he felt that his attire was too elaborate.

'Now sit down and have something to eat,' said the mother. 'I had to stand in the queue to get the meat to-day. . . . How long will this go on?'

'Why did you stand? We could have had something to eat in the communal restaurant, then there would have been no need for you to stand.'

'Why did I stand? . . . And haven't you just come in and asked for something to eat?'

'I asked for something to eat because I knew that you had everything prepared, and if I knew that you had not we should have gone to the restaurant—that's all there is about it.'

'And what should I have to do then?'

'Then why are you grumbling?'

'Now, perhaps, we shall have no bread this winter.'

'We shall live without bread and feel better without it.'

'Oh, you youngsters . . .' said the old woman, and she glanced at the sideboard as a passing lorry at that moment shook all the crockery.

'Do help yourself to some meat,' said Polukhin, and he himself made Kisliakof take a large piece of boiled meat on to his plate.

'Steady, why are you piling such a lot on?' exclaimed Kisliakof as if with a shade of displeasure, and at the same time he observed how he was able to talk quietly, like an old friend, with Polukhin. Instead of thanking him shyly and refusing in confusion, as would an ordinary guest in a case where there were no bonds of friendship.

After dinner Polukhin again glanced at his watch and took a worn exercise book with turned up corners from the table.

'Now we must go.'

Kisliakof thanked the old woman and said good-bye and they went out.

'This is where I am going,' said Polukhin, when they reached a side street, at the corner of which a long old stone building, which resembled a barrack, was being pulled down. The dust and plaster settled in a white layer even on the opposite pavement.

'Such rapid reconstruction is only possible under Communism,' remarked Kisliakof, looking at the demolished house. 'In the days of private ownership this falling structure would have stood for years and years. It is the same with everything else.'

'Quite right.'

The friends separated and Kisliakof went to his room, deciding to go later in the evening to see Arkady. He had a feeling of

inner uplift; his feet seemed as though they did not touch the ground and everything around looked bright.

After this visit he often went to see Polukhin and became more and more intimate with the Communists who frequented the house, entering their circle as one of themselves.

XXV

A FEW DAYS LATER HYPPOLIT KISLIAKOF WENT TO TAKE ARKADY and his wife to dine in style at a good restaurant.

It happened that the hundred roubles which Elena Victorovna had left him had become reduced to sixty-five. Where the other thirty-five had gone was not known, least of all to Kisliakof himself.

Nevertheless, he went to invite them to dine at a restaurant. Arkady and Tamara accepted with pleasure, and they went.

Kisliakof wanted to take them to some cheap place, but as they passed a large restaurant, with plate-glass windows, palms and multi-coloured shades, Tamara said in a tone of astonishment and pleasure:

'Is it possible that we are going here?'

It was impossible for Kisliakof to say:

'No, we are not going here, we are going to a place which is cheaper and not so good,' and he said that this was the place, but his heart was filled with misgivings. They took their things off and went up the heavily-carpeted staircase. Kisliakof talked gaily, glancing around the room as if he was a *habitué*. At the same time the waiters followed his glance and rushed from their places the moment his eyes rested on their tables.

From their inviting movements it could be seen that they expected a good order and a handsome tip, in spite of the fact that a notice on the wall said that tipping was prohibited. Clients visiting this place, in order to be well served and to get their meals quickly, pretended not to see this notice; in the same way the waiters did not see it.

The more Kisliakof was, by outside appearances, gay, the more nervously his heart beat, as though he was approaching a card table at which the stakes were high and where he would have to risk half of all he possessed. When the waiter placed the chairs, dusted the table over with a serviette and placed two large wine and food lists on it, Kisliakof felt as though he had recklessly staked a large sum and could not withdraw.

With a gay and carefree appearance he politely passed the menu to the lady and even bent his head over it himself, but against his will he was watching what wine and food Tamara would choose and how much they would cost.

He continued to be gay, but with a shade of nervousness. He kept taking his pence-nez off and putting them on again, which always showed that he was becoming upset, and in one absent-

mindful moment he crumpled up his serviette and was about to put it in his pocket when the waiter stopped him.

When the meal was served and the guests animatedly began to eat, he was involuntarily reckoning up in his mind how much he would have left if the worst happened, and how he would be able to exist until the end of the month.

This prolonged worry at last made his smile disappear; he became still more absent-minded, and it seemed to him that the waiters had long ago read his inner feelings and he avoided looking at them.

Tamara, who had put on a new dress, a becoming hat which fitted low over her eyes, and silk stockings, was looking round happily and smiling at her companions. She seemed delighted to be dining in such a sumptuous way. There was pleasure and pride in the glances which she occasionally threw towards Kisliakof.

'How fine and cosy it is here,' said Tamara, gazing round the room after finishing her sturgeon soup.

'Yes, this is the only place where one gets a complete change,' said Kisliakof.

'You are really too kind to us; we got quite out of the habit of going to restaurants.'

'Now, that's excellent,' said Kisliakof, who was thinking that perhaps Arkady would offer to pay half, in which case the hole in his budget would not be so great—otherwise, disaster!

These thoughts had made him lose his appetite and he could not eat anything. He had chosen the cheapest dishes for himself, but he did it with an air as though they were just what he had been looking for for a long time.

'Now where are we going?' asked he, whilst waiting for the bill, and he listened with a thumping heart for Tamara to say:

'Let us go somewhere in a taxi.'

But Arkady suggested going to his place and Tamara agreed.

When the bill was brought Kisliakof tried not to look at Arkady, not to allow himself to watch whether his friend would put his hand in his pocket for his wallet or not.

Arkady did put his hand in his pocket.

'What are you doing?' said Kisliakof hurriedly.

'We will share. . . . I think. . . .'

'Please don't, please don't . . . you are my guests,' said Kisliakof, and he reached for the bill. His eyes looked first of all for the total. It proved to be more than he had estimated when talking to his guests. He had forgotten that the wines counted double. The total amounted to twenty-five roubles; he must give

a two rouble tip and then there was the porter: it meant that there would be a hole of thirty roubles in his assets.

But the main thing was that Tamara had the impression that he had a lot of money and she would think it meant nothing for him to pay out five or ten roubles.

They went along the square, and Kisliakof suddenly saw that there were a lot of aggravating flower-sellers in the way. He shouted to Arkady that it would be nearer to take the side street on the right than to go along the square, but he shouted with such a tone of fear as though warning Arkady of some unseen danger.

It was already late when they reached the house, and they seated themselves on the couch without putting on the light. Tamara was very tender towards Arkady. It seemed to Kisliakof that the tenderness had some relation towards him. If he had not been there she would probably not have been so tender to the husband whom she saw every day.

'How nice it is that when one is in such a pleasant frame of mind one doesn't think of disagreeable things,' said she, probably including under disagreeable things her failures in trying to get on the stage and the consequent heartache.

Putting Arkady's hand on her shoulder she caressed it and rubbed her cheek against it. Her eyes from time to time rested on Kisliakof.

The telephone bell rang and Tamara got up.

'I am engaged,' said she abruptly, making a slight grimace.

'Who is it?' asked Arkady.

'One of my women friends.'

Tamara seated herself again on the couch, but her mood changed and she said with pain:—

'Is it possible that I shall never fight my way through to the stage? Is it possible that will never happen?'

'It will, it will. I am certain of that,' said Kisliakof. 'Here, take my hand for luck.' •

Tamara took his hand, pressed it, then thoughtfully caressed it. Arkady watched them with a smile, looking on them as children, and he was proud and happy that the two people who were dearest to him were seated there like brother and sister.

It only seemed strange to him that they could not become accustomed to each other, as if they were afraid to remain alone together on the couch, and when Arkady, as was his habit, paced the room as he talked, they both called him back to sit with them on the couch.

'Why do you jump up? It is so cosy when we sit together,' said Tamara, and she herself immediately got up.

Arkady served as a sort of link between them. When he was

there, Tamara, as if under his protection, could glance at Kisliakof and stroke his hand, which certainly would not have been so easy if they had not all been seated together on the couch.

'And you, yourself, why have you jumped up?' said Arkady.
'I don't want to sit without you.'

'What is the matter? Are you afraid of each other? Shall I never make you know each other? You cannot imagine how happy I was just now'—he addressed his friend—'when you were addressing each other as "thou". It gave me great pleasure.'

'It is even strange to me that I cannot look on Tamara, in spite of all my wishes, as a woman.'

Saying this, he glanced with a smile at Tamara, as if wishing to please her with his absolute disinterestedness and purity.

She watched him but said nothing, did not answer his smile, and looked thoughtfully aside.

Kisliakof felt that she was annoyed about something and tried to catch her eye, but she avoided his gaze.

'What still more pleases me about your friendship is that Tamara does not rush so often to the society of her women friends, but for some reason you are still shy of each other.'

'It is impossible to get used to each other so quickly,' said Tamara.

'But you must get used to each other.'

And when Kisliakof got up to say good-bye, Arkady playfully put their heads together and said:

'Now kiss him, just once, your chosen brother.'

Tamara put her arms round Kisliakof's neck and gave him a sisterly kiss, then moved away quickly.

'It is still alarming?' said Arkady, noticing the movement.

'Now, when I do get accustomed to him it will not be alarming,' answered Tamara.

Later on, when Kisliakof visited them, she greeted him with a sisterly kiss.

She usually returned from the theatres in a condition of profound despair.

Arkady annoyed her because he did not take her failures seriously.

'He always regards me as a small child who has lost her toys. Why can't he understand that I am facing a blank wall!' said she agitatedly. 'Why can't he understand that it is terrible? I sometimes want to break my head against this wall. I want to do work in which I can express myself, and this he does not understand.'

'But I do understand,' said Arkady guiltily, 'but what can be done.'

'Ah, "what can be done?"' Tamara replied with unexpected anger. 'That is another question. *Others* find what can be done.' 'Which others?'

'Others in general. Those who take a more simple view of things. Sometimes I feel that I would like to drop everything, as if I have no real place in life, and then *nothing matters*.'

'Do be sensible. What are you saying?'

'There is no question of being sensible. What I say I repeat.'

At such times all Arkady's condolences only annoyed her more, but she reacted to what Kisliakof said; he consoled her and told her that sooner or later she would go on the stage. He put his arms round her shoulders and opened up various comforting prospects, and she quietened down under the influence of his sympathy.

'It is a sort of absolute emptiness,' said Tamara. 'Do you understand? Inwardly there is nothing in me, and the feeling is torturing! I feel that I must ease it with something. . . . I can understand why people drink and . . . all that sort of thing. . . . Just to ease the consciousness for one moment. I was telling Arkady how very pleased I was to meet you. You have such fine and warm feelings as I never saw in others. . . . They are all such animals! I take a natural view of things, but I can always tell when anyone leaves behind an agreeable or a disagreeable feeling. It is worse when this sediment disgusts one, and worst of all when one meets emptiness. In trying to escape my own emptiness I think that near me is a real being . . . and it is just emptiness.'

She became exasperated with Arkady and only composed herself when Kisliakof began to persuade and encourage her. Sometimes, when he got up from the couch to go, she seized his hand nervously and said:

'Don't go away.'

Arkady now always sent Kisliakof to calm her in her downcast moods.

'Go to her; she takes more notice of you.'

XXVI

ON ONE OCCASION KISLIAKOF CALLED WHEN ARKADY WAS NOT AT home. Tamara was pacing the room; she had on her shoulders a white silk shawl with a fringe which reached to her knees. She hugged it round her bosom, as though she felt cold.

'Now, how are things with you?'

'Just anyhow. . . . It's always the same with me,' said Tamara with irritation.

She stood before him with her hands on her bosom under the shawl and looked at him strangely and mysteriously.

'And where is Arkady?'

'He is out.'

'You here alone?'

'Yes, I am alone. . . .'

Kisliakof's heart began to beat nervously.

She continued to gaze at him in the same way, and the thought came to him that she might think he had come purposely when Arkady was not there and would suspect his intentions. Why did she stare at him so?

'I thought that he would be at home by now.'

Tamara continued for some time longer to look at him in silence then she walked away and began to trace designs on the steamed window.

Not knowing what to do, Kisliakof approached her and took her hand from beneath her shawl. She let him hold it and turned to him quickly. Again her eyes were fixed strangely on him.

Kisliakof immediately released her hand. He thought that she was trying to test his decency. If he stroked her hand too tenderly she would say afterwards to Arkady: 'I never thought that one of the survivors of the intelligentsia could be so low.'

Kisliakof was so upset by the thought that he did not know how to behave.

She hid her chin in the shawl and, with lowered head, looked at him mysteriously.

'Why do you look at me so strangely?'

'How must I look?' said she, taking a step towards him.

Kisliakof took out a cigarette and began to smoke. Tamara watched him light it and then again looked at him.

'I have waited for you so anxiously,' said she, 'and you are not at all pleased to see me.'

'I not pleased? Where do you get that idea?'

'I don't mean anything to you.'

'What makes you say that?'

'You yourself once said it.'

'I said that I could not regard you as a woman.'

'How then?'

'As a sister.'

'When a man talks like that he is only trying to hide his indifference in a pleasant way. Of course, if I had been a famous artiste there would not have been such indifference. . . . And now, what am I? . . .'

She turned away abruptly and stood with her back to him.

Kisliakof knew that a woman turns her back on a man for one of two reasons: either when she is offended, or when she wants to allow him greater freedom of action. He could easily have put his arms round her neck from behind, could easily have pressed his lips on her white round neck, but he decided in any case to be on his guard. Then Tamara would say to Arkady: 'There is the only honest man and friend, who will never deceive you or betray you; in the midst of the general decay of the intelligentsia he still retains the highest principles of life, still has will-power and self-control.'

'And how do you know?' Arkady would ask.

'Because, in your absence, I decided to test him, and appeared to be an unprincipled woman, like my women friends about whom you have told him, and he took no liberties but was as firm as a rock.'

As he thought about this he stood for quite a long time in absolute silence behind Tamara.

At last she looked at him with astonishment and, moving away from the window, seated herself with impatience on the couch. At that moment the door opened and Arkady entered.

'Ah, you are here at last!' exclaimed Kisliakof. Owing to the awkwardness of the position he said this with excessive pleasure, to prevent Arkady from having any suspicions at seeing them together, but the words were spoken so awkwardly that it appeared as though Tamara had bored him with her emptiness, and that he was sincerely pleased with the arrival of his friend, which relieved him of her.

Arkady brought in purchases and, presenting his pockets to Kisliakof, one after the other, said:

'Unload, unload.'

Tamara did not move from the couch. She had drawn the ends of the shawl over her knees and hid her chin in it. She did not even glance in the direction of her husband when he entered.

'What is the matter?' asked Arkady, looking first at his wife and then at Kisliakof. 'Have you quarrelled?'

'Yes, just a small difference of opinion,' said Kisliakof.

'No difference of opinion whatever,' replied Tamara, pushing Arkady away roughly as he attempted to kiss her. 'I merely thought that people would treat me better than appears to be the case.'

Kisliakof was seized with the fear that she was about to say something terrible, perhaps that he, in the absence of her husband, had certainly tried to make up his mind to treat her as a woman without principles like her women friends, but had not had the pluck to do it because he was afraid that she would tell her husband.

'Then what is it all about?' asked Arkady.

'The matter is simply that your friend was impatient for your arrival; it bored him to be with a woman who meant nothing to him. You are like something sacred to him and he cannot see anything else.'

The tone was jocular, but it was evident that there was real annoyance behind it.

'How can he not see anything else?' asked Kisliakof.

'Quite simply,' answered Tamara, without looking at him.

When they sat down to supper she drank glass after glass of wine. Arkady tried to stop her, but she pushed him away more rudely than could have been expected of her and said:

'Go to the devil!'

She said it as one of her women friends would probably have done. Both men felt uncomfortable.

Each approach of Arkady increased her irritation, and when Kisliakof tried to pacify her, she answered him with a cold, stubborn silence, which made him feel that he was in some way to blame for this family quarrel.

Suddenly she jumped up and ran into the bedroom. Arkady looked after her anxiously.

'Go and see what is the matter with her,' said Kisliakof.

Arkady went into the bedroom, then he came out with an abashed expression. He had an empty glass in his hand.

'It was a mistake to give her wine,' said he, filling the glass with water from a decanter on the sideboard. 'I will put her to bed at once.'

In about five minutes he peeped out of the bedroom door.

'She wants you.'

Kisliakof extinguished the cigarette which he had just lit and went in like a doctor going to a patient who has been prepared for his arrival.

Tamara was lying in bed with the blanket tucked under her chin. Her dress was on a chair nearby. Her eyes were closed.

'Sit here,' said she in a faintly audible whisper, opening her eyes for a second and indicating a place near her on the edge of the bed.

Kisliakof seated himself, his side touched her hand, which was concealed beneath the bed clothes. He felt the hand and began to stroke it over the cover, like a doctor trying to soothe his patient.

Arkady seated himself at the other side. Tamara did not look in his direction, treating him as a man who irritates with his presence but cannot be told so. At every moment she asked him for one thing or another and became excited when he did anything in the wrong way.

Her rudeness to Arkady made Kisliakof feel uncomfortable, and the feeling was increased by the fact that he seemed to be in a privileged position. It was too obvious that she was more kind and tolerant towards him than towards her husband. Once she even squeezed Kisliakof's hand nervously through the cover. When he re-arranged the damp towel on her forehead she did not become annoyed as she did at every touch of Arkady, but just opened her eyes and gazed at him seriously and silently.

She again gripped Kisliakof's hand, and, without releasing it, lay for a long time motionless, her eyes closed.

Kisliakof responded by quietly moving his hand in hers so as not to appear to be an indifferent and unfeeling spectator who had been there and compelled to look after a patient.

'Perhaps you ought to have some valerian drops?' suggested Arkady.

Tamara's face twitched painfully. She made an impatient movement as if at a loss to know how to avoid the annoyance of these solicitous attentions. Then with an effort she said:

'Give me some phenacetin.'

'We haven't any,' answered Arkady.

'If we haven't any you must go and buy some.'

Kisliakof felt that he ought to jump up and say:

'Oh, I will go. . . .'

But he did not jump up and say this because at the same time Tamara's hand squeezed his more tightly, as if she was glad of the opportunity, if only for a moment, to be relieved of these irksome attentions.

Arkady went out. Tamara immediately threw the towel from her head, and, putting her round arms over the bed cover, looked at Kisliakof with that strange glance which before had made him so nervous and unable to know how to behave.

'So Arkady is dearer to you than anything else in the world?

You only find it interesting to talk to him or to women who are in some way unusual, who have attained a position?' said Tamara, keeping her gaze fixed on Kisliakof. She took his hand and slowly pulled it towards herself.

Kisliakof did not know what reply to make and decided to return her stare. She could understand it as she liked. At the same time she was drawing him towards her, so that in a short time his face was quite near to hers.

'So I am only an indifferent relation to you?' said Tamara.

Her eyes, close to his, seemed to become very large, her nostrils trembled. He tried to make his own nostrils tremble, probably this indicated a passionate nature.

'Only a relation?' repeated Tamara in a whisper.

Her trembling hand pulled him more closely towards her, until he felt her cold, moist, parted lips on his.

It all happened so unexpectedly. . . . He only remembered that at the knock on the entrance door he jumped aside guiltily, stumbled on the carpet and almost bumped his head on the washstand. For this reason he had not the time to take up his former position on the edge of the bed, and just sat in a chair near the window.

This seemed stupid. . . . Why had he been sitting on the bed when the husband was there and now some distance away on a chair?

Arkady even looked with astonishment at them and said:

'What! Have you been quarrelling again?'

'Yes,' said Kisliakof, and he prepared to go.

XXVII

HE RETURNED HOME TREADING ON AIR, AS IF A WHIRLWIND WHICH he had not expected, of which he had not even thought, had seized him.

His only thought was that this meant that he was capable of intense passion, which overruled his mind and overcame all obstacles.

He might go to Arkady and say:

'Judge me as you like, but I was and still remain an honest man. I will tell you quite candidly that I was seized with passion, which was stronger than me or anything else in the world. This is my misfortune and greatest happiness, because it makes me feel that I am still living. It is not the same as when a man fails to resist from weakness of will, lack of principles or lack of self-control; this comes from the highest exaltation of life, which in such cases makes a man insane and capable of the greatest crime.'

That is what he would have said to Arkady if he had been near him at that moment.

If only Tamara proved to have the same feeling towards him.

For one moment he was frightened by the thought that after this she would not feel able to remain under the same roof as Arkady, and would leave him in some cruel and inhuman way. The worst of this would be that he would not be able to say: 'Judge me as you like.' . . .

But he calmed himself with the idea that Tamara would take no such step without warning him.

The next morning he rose early, and with an enthusiasm which he had not experienced for a long time, worked for a whole hour on the scheme of reorganization of the museum.

Suddenly someone rang three times—it was for him. The dogs began to bark as usual in the corridor, and a number of heads appeared from the doors to call the dogs off in case the visitor was a stranger. The lower middle class woman, with slippers on her bare feet, was out before anyone else.

Wondering who it could be, Kisliakof went to open the door. The thought flashed through his mind that his wife had returned. This would have been more than inconvenient, and perhaps . . . just at the right moment, because he would then be able to tell her everything without delay.

He opened the door and was so dumbfounded that he did not know what to do or say. On the door-step stood Tamara. She

had one of her usual tightly-fitting hats pulled low over her eyes.

Human thought is distinguished by its extraordinary lightning-like quickness. In that short moment which passed between the time he opened the door and the first words he addressed to Tamara, all manner of thoughts flashed through his mind as to the reason why she had come to his place at such an early hour as eleven o'clock in the morning.

First of all he was struck as with a huge hammer by the thought that she had already told Arkady everything and had left him to come and live with him, Kisliakof, not knowing that he was married.

Perhaps she would attach herself to him with all the strength of her young passion. On what means could he keep her? Where could he put her?

All this flashed through his mind in a few seconds.

'What chance brings you here? Are you alone or is Arkady with you?' he exclaimed in a tone of surprise and pleasure, to give the neighbours the impression that she was a relative.

'I was on my way to the bureau and I thought I would like to see what sort of a place you have. May I?'

Kisliakof felt easier at heart. At any rate she had not thrown her arms round his neck and said before all the neighbours:

'Take me from my husband; I cannot live with him.'

'With pleasure. Do come inside.'

He saw the lady with the lilac shawl going into the bathroom, and deliberately, in front of her eyes, he took Tamara's arm and led her into his room.

Without removing her hat, Tamara looked round the room. She stood there; tall, young; her blue autumn costume and close-fitting hat emphasized the milky whiteness of her face and neck and the redness of her painted lips.

Then she glanced at Kisliakof and smiled slowly, like one who has just been left alone with a person with whom one was recently become intimate.

Kisliakof suddenly covered his face with his hand and stood in the middle of the room.

'I have been troubled all the night,' he said, almost in a whisper, keeping his hand over his eyes. 'I could scarcely wait until daybreak.'

Tamara approached him. On her face was a smile of satisfaction, as though she felt her ascendancy over him when he said that he had been troubled without her.

'Why were you troubled?'

'Because I am a blackguard,' he replied, in a tone of despair.

He removed his hand from his eyes and, as if not having the strength to look his victim or accomplice in the face, went over and stood near the window for some time.

The silence behind him seemed to indicate that the reply was quite different from what had been expected when he began to speak about having been troubled.

'Why do you say this?' asked Tamara, going towards him and speaking in a guarded tone, as if already prepared to take offence when he made his meaning clear.

'Because I have betrayed my best friend, my *only* friend.'

A look of indifferent astonishment flashed across Tamara's face.

'I realized that I had done a dishonourable thing and I *cannot* do anything with myself, as my feeling for you has taken such a complete hold on me,' said Kisliakof, giving a somewhat different meaning to his words as he became frightened that Tamara would be annoyed and leave the room.

Tamara took his hand and, stroking his fingers gently, said:

'And is it bad when there is such strong feeling? Is it worse than when there is nothing?'

'Yes, but it terrifies me to think of how I will be able to look him in the face when he knows.'

'And how will he know? I certainly am not prepared to tell him about it or to leave him. I look upon it quite simply, without any sort of mystic terror, but to him the thought of my unfaithfulness'—she sarcastically emphasized the word 'unfaithfulness'—'is so impossible and terrible that it is much better not to tell him anything.'

'Then thank God!' said Kisliakof with relief.

He seated Tamara on the couch and sat on the carpet at her feet, beginning to cover her hands with kisses of delight and passion, and at the same time tried to remove her hat and jacket without interrupting his kissing, but she recollected herself:

'What are you doing . . . don't . . .' she protested weakly.

Suddenly there came a bang of what seemed to be a samovar pipe from the direction of the lower middle class woman's room behind the partition. Tamara jumped from the couch in fright.

'It's nothing . . . nothing that matters . . .' said Kisliakof, sitting her on the couch again and embracing her, trying to press her towards himself, although at the same time he was thinking that the lower middle class woman was listening and knew what was going on.

He knelt before Tamara, holding her large hand in one of his, stroking her round back with the other, gently drawing her towards himself and whispering gentle words, she, with a mist before her eyes and a wandering smile, stroked and ruffled his hair.

But it seemed to Kisliakof that she was not looking at him but at the opposite wall.

'Now, do look at me,' said he, trying to turn her head in his direction. Suddenly he was bathed in perspiration when he thought that perhaps she had seen a bug on the wall, and, owing to his short-sightedness, he could not even verify this.

And this unfortunate thought interrupted his mood, and prevented any transport which might have caused further passionate words to rush from his lips.

Tamara looked with astonishment at this cavalier who had suddenly become strangely quiet. His whole position, with his arm round Tamara's waist, was like that of someone who had taken an unnatural position in front of a photographer and could not alter it.

'What is the matter with you?' asked Tamara in astonishment, and her gaze, having lost all trace of mist, only expressed surprise.

'I . . . nothing . . . ' said Kisliakof, blushing. He got up from the carpet and, standing before the young woman, gazed mysteriously into her eyes, at the same time blocking her view of the opposite wall.

He was suddenly struck, as if by a thunderbolt, with a new thought which had for the moment quite escaped him, the thought of the possibility of a child. This, at the same time, might explain his strange behaviour with Tamara.

'You are not afraid . . . of a child?' asked he.

'What about it?' asked Tamara languidly and unconcernedly.

'How do you mean "what about it?" Because people will know by the resemblance whose it is.'

'But that won't happen at once.'

'Not at once?'

'Of course, not at once. But why am I sitting here, it is a quarter-past eleven already. I must go to the bureau.'

She got up from the couch and hurriedly began to put on her hat and gloves. She did not look at Kisliakof as she did this.

After she had gone Kisliakof rushed first of all to the wall and examined it. There was nothing on it.

He had to go to his work, but, going into the corridor, he immediately came face to face with something which caused his heart to beat agitatedly.

XXVIII

AGAIN, IN THE SAME PLACE OPPOSITE HIS DOOR, HUNG A COLOURED sheet, showing the same scenes from his life which had been on the one he had torn down previously.

His hand was already raised to tear it down, and it remained suspended in the air as he read the heading:

‘Wall-Newspaper of the Budenny Detachment.’

Trembling with indignation and excitement, he went down to the manager of the house, who was seated in the basement checking some receipts.

Kisliakof flew at him and in a heated tone began to tell of the indecency of the children in Flat No. 6.

‘What do you want?’ said the manager at last. ‘They are quite entitled to have their newspaper. They have presented the required notice and request for registration, and although we certainly cannot register them, we are, as you might say, forced to encourage and not to prevent juvenile organization. If you find anything wrong in it, make the necessary protest, we will certainly verify the facts if there is any question of libel.’

Kisliakof felt that he was faced with a power which he could not fight, and he also felt what organization and Socialism could mean. . . .

The juvenile population of Flat No. 6 had changed from a dis-united mass into a strict organization. Previously, each one had had to look after himself, and if he fell under the warm hand of one of the tenants and received a hiding, the others either ran away in different directions, to save their own skins, or stood quietly on one side, watching the execution. Now the whole detachment stood behind each individual member; this changed the matter considerably.

In the first issues of the Wall-Newspaper, Budenny Detachment began to draw the attention of the community to the lack of ‘the most elementary necessity of existence’—the absence of premises for themselves.

At the moment when Kisliakof was looking at the caricature of himself on the wall, the whole detachment was watching him with breathless expectancy from behind the bathroom door, like hunters watching a tiger for which they have laid a snare. When he rushed away to see the manager of the house an extraordinary general meeting was convened, in order to determine the line of future policy.

First of all Sania Tuzikov went to see the manager after Kisliakof had left, and, without any hint of asking a favour, requested

that he should be informed officially whether in the view of the recent complaint of Comrade Kisliakof the Wall-Newspaper would continue or be abolished. The manager of the house waved him away and said that it would continue, and asked him not to annoy him.

Sania Tuzikov went upstairs and, waving his hand to those who awaited him, said: 'Let's discuss the matter outside among the bushes.'

'The second number of the journal will be published next week,' said Sania Tuzikov. 'Comrade Tsibikov will take care to collect the material.'

XXIX

THE EXISTENCE OF THE BUDENNY DETACHMENT WAS THE FLY IN THE ointment which poisoned Kisliakof's existence. In his friendship with Polukhin he felt that he had been reborn as a member of the new regime. At his work he felt that he had already entered into a new life and that all that remained from the old one was his old-fashioned clothes. In spite of his much belated crossing over, he did not feel that there was anything strange in his relationship towards the director.

But at home, the turn for duty, the communal house committees and especially the activities of the boys, reminded him that in addition to having old-fashioned clothes he still stood with one leg in one clan and one in another.

The Detachment was like an all-seeing Providence, which revealed or threatened to reveal the most concealed sins of his life and of his class personality.

To-day's escapade of the Detachment had been particularly painful, because he had already completed the scheme for Polukhin and was about to hand it in; this had confirmed his belief in his rebirth.

Kisliakof did not arrive at his work with the depressed feeling of the old days. Before, he had involuntarily lowered his eyes on meeting Polukhin, thinking that he, a man of the educated class, occupied a precarious position and would be turned out as soon as the work had been investigated.

He now felt a quiet self-assurance and security when he opened the door and inhaled the familiar church-like smell. He entered the establishment with a sort of feeling that he was the owner. He did not shrink at the thought of meeting the director in the corridor, and did not try to pass him without being seen; he was no longer an unfriendly stranger, but almost a close friend. And Kisliakof's sympathies began to extend to the whole proletariat. He put it to himself thus:

'Now, take it this way: these are uncultured people, but they are better able to appreciate a man and his work than the cultured ones, under whom I managed an entirely unnecessary department of holy images, whilst under the uncultured ones I do a great and live work.'

This completely changed his point of view towards the intelligentsia. Against his will he began to look on them with contempt, as a class which remained on the other bank and was incapable of changing over to the other side as had he, Hyppolit

Kisliakof. With extreme sensitiveness he could immediately distinguish people of the educated class, perhaps by the formation of a sentence, or by the scarcely noticeable flavour of idealism. He measured this by the criterion of how Polukhin or any of the proletariat would look upon it.

The manners of Marya Pavlovna, her lorgnette and French chatter were especially unbearable. He could not understand how she herself did not notice how funny she was, with her georgette neckband, which she kept on during her work, and with her French sentences, which always caused the man in the blue overall to glance round. He now tried not to meet her face to face, so that he need not kiss her hand and answer in French. When he looked at the gloomy monastic figure of Galahof and the noble bearing of Andrey Ignatich, he saw clearly how unsuited they were to the new regime; they could not change in any way, and in addition, when they saw a change in others they, 'from the heights of the idealism of the people of the educated class,' considered that such a man had played false to himself and that he was a traitor.

It seemed particularly strange to hear Marya Pavlovna's commentary on the way people were dressed at the last conference, and who was wearing an ugly tie—and yet he remembered that he himself had blushed when he had to put on a cheap artificial silk Soviet tie, or when he had to wear dark trousers with his morning coat instead of striped ones. It now became more difficult for him to appear before the scouts, who always wore cotton trousers and open-necked exercise shirts, even if he was wearing dark trousers with his morning jacket. When he was with them this thoroughly worn suit and stiff collar made him feel uncomfortable: they showed him to be an outsider—a man of the educated class.

His relationship with his colleagues was now expressed only in the exchange of a few sentences when meeting. For the same reason they did not ask why he had given up his previous work and what he was doing now. That they did not ask meant that they had already made up their minds about him and probably condemned him as having contravened the chief commandment of the people of the educated class—not to become intimate with the chiefs and authorities, not to play false with himself and not to have any connection with force.

When he first realized the coldness of his colleagues he could have said to them:

'Anyhow, the culture which I really served, which put freedom of thought and enlargement of the rights of personality first, has died, which means that I cannot live and work in a *real way*—and yet I must live somehow. One must look at this, having finished

once and for all with the unfounded idealism and sincerity of thought of the intelligentsia.'

But lately he more often felt a sensation of pleasure because of his real unity with the new regime. The further he went, the more he was interested by his new occupation and filled with enthusiasm by the perspectives of reconstruction which Polukhin drew before him. He was not sure, however, how great was his love for Polukhin as an individual and not as a man who had dragged him from the surface of life where he had already been prepared to read the burial service over himself.

A friendly attitude of a person in authority over you in itself gives great pleasure (the pleasure diminishes when the person loses his position), but even now, when between the chief and his subordinates there existed the principles of proletarian equality, Kisliakof did not feel it. The proletariat really perhaps felt this equality because the technical employees addressed the director as 'thou', but he, a man of the educated class, felt his *inequality* with the director, which made all the more agreeable and precious for him his friendly relationships with the *director Comrade Polukhin*.

The main cause of the feelings which Kisliakof felt in his relationship with Polukhin was that he was a Party man. This Kisliakof understood as a layman understands the dignity of the Church, because a cleric may touch holy objects which a layman cannot. But the layman has nothing against a clergyman for this. Nor had Kisliakof anything against Polukhin. He felt only pleasure each time he came in contact with him, especially when he met him in the street or in a theatre. In such places Polukhin was even simpler and kinder than at the museum; he felt himself as though not quite at ease there, even sometimes looked for Kisliakof's protection, taking him by the arm and walking down the corridor, asking his opinion about the actors and the play.

Kisliakof could recognize his grey cap and brown mackintosh from afar; such caps and mackintoshes were innumerable, but Polukhin's cap was something unique, which Kisliakof could always pick out from thousands of other caps. He even felt some tenderness towards it.

XXX

THE CHILDREN HAD SPOILED THE MORNING FOR KISLIAKOF, HIS ONE pleasing thought was that the scheme was completed. He could now penetrate with justification to the seclusion of Polukhin's study and listen to what he had to say. Assuredly after looking the scheme over he would jump up from the table, slap Kisliakof on the back and exclaim:

'Splendid, my friend. If only the entire intelligentsia worked like this, what results we should achieve!'

On arriving at the museum he went straight to the director's study. A bald-headed old man in an overcoat, with his hat on his knees, was with Polukhin. Kisliakof, by way of asserting his rights of friendship and intimacy, entered the study without knocking; after the manner of Communists demonstrating their equality. He shook hands in silence with Polukhin and seated himself on the window sill.

He regarded the visitor as an intruder, with irritable impatience. He had entered hoping to find Polukhin alone, intending to greet him with such words as: 'Finished!' or 'Now, my friend, it is finished; now criticize it!'

He could not say this in front of a stranger and would have to wait until he had gone. The longer he waited the more his enthusiasm waned.

The visitor proved to be a professor, who was offering an archæological collection to the museum.

Kisliakof regarded him from the point of view of a Communist and proletarian, by whom anything pertaining to the intelligentsia was regarded as 'foreign.' The professor's whole manner annoyed him, especially his polite way of saying: 'You had the kindness to say.' 'If I may be allowed to remark,' and so on.

As though through a magnifying glass, Kisliakof saw in the professor all the detested traits of an intellectual: meekness, helplessness and confusion. He despised him because he dropped his hat and did not notice it. Kisliakof made no attempt to pick it up for him, for he saw these strange characteristics from the Communistic viewpoint, as though he himself were a proletarian.

In his arguments with Polukhin the professor looked to Kisliakof for support as to a man of his own class, but the latter sat with a stern face and did not respond to his gentle, confused smile. The professor was like a scholar who, having failed in an examination, wants to gain the sympathy of the usher but meets only with a cold, unsympathetic stare.

Kisliakof again saw in him all the peculiarities which were apparent in nearly all the intelligentsia, who, absorbed in intellectual pursuits, had no contact with the masses; all such people bore the stamp of something monastic, they were weak, and from the point of view of a materialist had a sort of sacred inadaptability to life. Kisliakof felt ashamed of him.

At last the professor got up to go and with astonishment looked first at his hands and then on the floor near where he was sitting. The hat was lying behind him and he could not see it.

Again Kisliakof made no attempt to pick it up, or to show the professor where it was.

'Ah, there it is,' said the professor at last, and smiling shamefacedly again glanced at Kisliakof, but received no answering smile.

Kisliakof got up from the window sill and waited for the professor to leave them alone. The latter, shaking hands with Polukhin and bowing apologetically to Kisliakof, made his way out.

Without saying a word to Polukhin, Kisliakof mysteriously went over to the door and locked it. Then he drew a chair up to the director, who was following his movements with astonishment, took a bundle of papers from his pocket and said:

'Now, my friend, it is finished. Listen and criticize! Let me read it through and then say whether it's good enough or just damned nonsense.'

In the old days Kisliakof would have been shocked by such vulgarity, which would have driven Marya Pavlovna to despair. Now he was always being vulgar and it seemed to him it helped him in his dealings with such people as Polukhin, made him more like *one of them* and avoided the intellectual stamp so abhorrent to the proletariat.

He began by saying that as the museum stood at present it was useless; that their central museum, representative of the whole Soviet Union, was like a tomb, to be seen only by the reverent. To his mind the whole of past Russian history should be divided into the most characteristic periods, and exhibits of the same period which had a bearing on the life of the Tsars, nobles and peasants, should be collected in the same hall.

This would show not only the conditions of life of Tsars and peasants, but a relativity of history, as it would demonstrate all the inequalities of the conditions of living. Then, between these main classes, there began to filter in during the nineteenth century, another group; commoners, intelligentsia, which was the beginning of *bourgeoisie*. This also must be shown. Then workmen began to appear as a class. The social structure enlarged, branched out further and further, social distinctions became still more sharply defined, and finally they reached their limit in the War,

with the *bourgeoisie* enriching themselves at the expense of the combatants. At last, an explosion and a new era—the revolution.

The epoch of the revolution must be shown in all the variety of its construction; it must be divided into three periods—the periods of strife, re-establishment and reconstruction. They must collect the instruments of warfare and all relics which were connected with the cruel struggle of the proletariat with the enemy. Then there must be plans of building schemes drawn up, from the first stage of electrification after the Eighth conference of the Soviets. They must also show the evolution of agricultural development—its change from the individual to the collective.

The museum must be brought down to the level of working class, to the proletariat, so that they might go to look at it as a general looks at his map and sees where lie his weakness and strength.

With his chin resting on his hand, Polukhin looked at the sheet of paper on which the rough plan was drafted; he listened, occasionally raising his head and gazing at Kisliakof. His living eye gleamed with interest, while his glass one remained disinterested and passive, as if with its indifference negating everything that Kisliakof said. It so perturbed the latter that he tried not to look at it.

At last the director got up and, without speaking to Kisliakof, began to pace the study, gazing intently at the floor.

Kisliakof had expected that at this moment Polukhin would give him a pat on the shoulder and exclaim with delight:

‘Excellent, my friend. . . .’

The silence caused him a feeling of agitation. Watching the director, he began to gather the papers together, as a pupil collects his exercise books after reporting to his teacher, that he may hide his excitement and blushes in the expectation of some acknowledgment of his success.

Several agitating thoughts flashed across his mind. Would not Polukhin see in his schemes a clever opening to a career? Or perhaps he was annoyed because he had locked the door with such an air of intimacy. Polukhin might think: ‘He was only invited to help, nothing has been done yet but he already makes himself at home in my study.’

The longer Polukhin was silent and the more Kisliakof tried to guess the cause of his silence, the more his cheeks burned, and his hands even slightly trembled.

Polukhin stopped in the opposite corner of the study, some distance away from the table, and said:

‘Yes, my friend! . . .’

This single exclamation showed Kisliakof at once that he had won! . . . Polukhin was not silent because he was in doubt

but probably because the brilliant picture produced in his mind by Kisliakof's report had come as a surprise to his intelligence.

'Yes, my friend,' repeated Polukhin, 'this is something! . . . Relativity of history is just what must be shown. It will settle everything and will make clear just what is necessary and what is not. And how simple! History must be alive and moving, not dead as it is here.'

'Now that is real Marxism,' said Kisliakof.

'Yes, it is Marxism,' repeated Polukhin, still standing in the same spot. 'You have drawn it up splendidly! Smart fellow!'

Hearing the last words, which he had expected much sooner, by a great effort Kisliakof retained a quiet and even unconcerned appearance. He had a feeling of joy, but quite different from that which he had experienced after some technical achievement as an engineer. It was the joy of a bailiff who has been praised by the owner of an estate for his zealous service.

Kisliakof now felt that, by the impression he had produced on Polukhin, he had the right to lock the door.

'Let us go and plan it all out,' said Polukhin.

They entered the first hall.

'Now why the devil did they fill the whole place with robes of Boyars and Tsars?' said the director, pausing to look at the yellow glass cases which stood along the walls and in the middle of the room.

'Ah-ah, now you can see at once where the drawback comes: the trouble is in the exhibits and not in the quantity and differences of style. When this hall contains Tsars' furniture and nearby a peasant's hut with its primitive heating, then we shall make an impression, and Nicholas the First's hats can go to the devil.'

'Why to the devil?' said Kisliakof. 'We might even add some crowns if you like, and adjoining put some Party proclamations and a hook from the gallows. You can understand how one calls for the other! Do you see what work can be done here!' said Kisliakof, taking off his pince-nez in his excitement and looking at Polukhin. 'And by what means we can show the relativity of history!'

Kisliakof was suddenly conscious of joyful excitement at such a happily expressed thought.

'The whole life of the country, all its history and progress will be compressed into a relatively small space,' said he, feeling with pleasure that he was flushed with excitement.

Museum officials who were passing looked round and even stopped, feeling that some reorganization was in view.

The chief of the department in which Kisliakof worked passed by. He had every right to ask Kisliakof why he was not at his

work, but he asked nothing. Kisliakof did not even look round at him. For some reason he had a sudden feeling that the chief of the department was not a superior but almost a subordinate. Perhaps it was because of his own friendly relationship with the director.

As if by instinct, as though trying to convince himself of his right not to be at his work during working hours, he said to Polukhin:

'And to think that if it had not been for you how much longer I should have been sitting fussing about with ikons and rubbishy books. You know we have such strange people here, who tremble over every book, not because it contains precious thoughts, but because it is three hundred years old.'

'Well, what about it. We must start putting life into the business,' said Polukhin. 'We must adopt revolutionary measures without any committees or sub-committees being set up, otherwise the matter will be dragging on for five years.'

'Yes, certainly,' agreed Kisliakof, 'and too many cooks spoil the broth.'

'Just so . . . just so. . . .'

XXXI

THE TALK WITH POLUKHIN LEFT KISLIAKOF WITH UNABATED ENTHUSIASM. He felt it necessary to confide in someone else, to talk to someone about it.

It would be foolish to tell his colleagues about the forthcoming reorganization as planned by him. They would look askance at him as someone who had approached the chief with a policy hostile to themselves, resulting probably in some dismissals.

The whole staff of the museum were afraid, more than of anything else, that when the various changes and reorganization took place they would be among those to be discharged. If such reorganization was promoted by those in power they bowed before it as a force which could not be controlled, but if it came from one of themselves it would naturally produce indignation among them.

So Kisliakof went to the meeting place of the scouts' group. It was a section of a low vaulted room on the ground floor.

A table covered with a sheet of ink-stained green blotting-paper was in the middle of the room. On the walls hung posters which had been there since the May celebrations. In the corner stood a red gold-embroidered banner, while plain benches and straight-backed wooden arm-chairs were ranged around the walls.

Three people were present when he entered: Churikov, who had been on the platform at the first meeting, his fingers thrust through his fair hair, was seated at the table, bending over a sheet of paper, busily engaged in writing, and on consideration, re-writing. Near him were two other scouts, who, with caps perched on the back of their heads, leaned over the table watching what he was doing.

'Is Comrade Sidorov here?' asked Kisliakof as he came in.

'He has been here, but went away some time ago,' said Churikov, looking up from what he was writing.

Kisliakof did not want anyone, but he felt that he could not come here very well without a purpose, so he made it appear that he was looking for the technical worker Sidorov.

He felt less at his ease with the scouts than with Polukhin, chiefly because he was almost old enough to be their father, which made it difficult for him to speak in a comradely tone, to call them 'comrades', as they called each other. Without this their intercourse must remain brief and official.

In his present state of elation he wanted to feel more at ease. This desire was quite disinterested, arising solely from the joy of

knowing that he could reciprocate their expressions of comradeship, though really foreign to his nature.

'I think I'll have a smoke,' said he, in the tone of a man who, tired by his work, decides to rest for a few moments.

He opened his cigarette case and handed it to the scouts who silently took cigarettes.

'It is hard to know what cigarettes to smoke,' said Kisliakof. 'One tries one brand first and then another: they are all right to begin with, but they get worse and worse.'

'We smoke "Pushkas",' said one of the scouts, with a smile.

'I used to smoke them, but I did not like them because they used to make me cough,' answered Kisliakof, who felt that he must not let it appear to the scouts that he was an aristocrat, who smoked expensive cigarettes.

He wanted to sit on the bench, but sat on the window-sill instead, putting his feet on the wooden arm-chair which stood in front of the window. Such a position gave him a feeling of greater liberty, because an outsider, and an intellectual, would scarcely under the circumstances, have seated himself in such a way.

Even to the scouts, unused as they might be to any sort of ceremonial, it must have seemed strange. But they did not look at him with astonishment or exchange glances between themselves.

'I think our comrades in the museum will be quite upset,' said he.

'Why?' asked Churikov.

'Comrade Polukhin has devised a far-reaching scheme for the reorganization of the museum.'

Kisliakof began to give details.

At that moment Maslov entered the room. His black eyebrows, meeting over the bridge of his nose, for some reason disturbed Kisliakof; he felt ill at ease because he could not smoke a cigarette and gossip with him in a friendly way, as with Churikov. Maslov always seemed to remain aloof and as if on his guard, and now, when he came in, looked first of all with cold astonishment at Kisliakof, sitting on the window-sill. Silent, he greeted no one and appeared to pay no attention to what Kisliakof was saying. He approached the table and began to trace designs on the blotting paper absently, as one who had gone to his room to work and found there a stranger airing his views.

From the moment of Maslov's entrance Kisliakof's animation waned, and although he continued to talk in the same tone he felt continuously aware of the presence of the former, who took no part in the conversation, but stood in silence near the table.

He did not ask what it was all about, as if wishing to show by his indifference that he was not interested in this cultured intruder's conversation, and did not know why he had come here.

'To my mind this will be a wonderful thing,' said Kisliakof, finishing his explanation and moving down from the window-sill, as though to throw his cigarette end away, but really to change his position, which from the moment Maslov entered had seemed to him strange and uncomfortable.

'But why hasn't he told us about it himself? Is he making a secret of it?' asked Maslov, glancing coldly at Kisliakof,

In a sudden fright, which made his nerves tingle, Kisliakof realized that he had made a great mistake in talking to the scouts about the scheme before Polukhin himself had broached the subject. They would now lodge a protest that the group was the last to know about the proposals of the director, and Polukhin would send for him and say: 'You have been gossiping like an old woman and have put me in a nice fix. Go to the devil with your schemes; you will only make trouble for me,' or something of that sort.

These thoughts crowding through his mind plunged him immediately into his usual condition of depressed confusion. All the animation and sparkle in his eyes vanished at once.

'He has tendencies to dictatorship,' said Maslov. 'He must be stopped somehow. Give me a cigarette,' He addressed Churikov.

'Here, take one of mine,' said Kisliakof.

'You haven't many for yourself,' said Maslov, seeing that there were only three cigarettes in the case.

'Do take one, do take one,' said Kisliakof. He had absolutely no idea how he came to be speaking so familiarly with Maslov.

When the scout put his cigarette in his mouth Kisliakof did not hasten to light a match with the polite attention expected of an aristocrat, but idly tendered his lighted cigarette-stub to Maslov, feeling that this careless, friendly gesture united him with the gloomy secretary of the union more than any words could have done.

It suddenly seemed to Kisliakof that all the same Maslov was a fine fellow when approached naturally and not from an intellectual level, but at the same time he thought he must advise Polukhin to bring the scouts into the business, so that they could not imagine that the director was ignoring them.

XXXII

THE NEXT DAY KISLIAKOF WAS SOMEWHAT LATE IN ARRIVING AT his work and was immediately struck by the alarmed faces of his colleagues.

Something had happened.

His first thought was there had been some changes, and he found that two of his colleagues—Marya Pavlovna and Andrey Ignatich had been dismissed.

Several employees gathered in the corridor near the staircase when work was over and discussed the incident excitedly. Kisliakof was passing by, and he felt that it would be impossible for him to go on without expressing his views on the matter.

Marya Pavlovna, her cheeks flushed with anger, was saying agitatedly:

"Let them give me a reason! Have I been a bad or unscientific worker? Nobody can say that. Hyppolit Grigorievitch here has seen my work. Can you say there was anything wrong with it?"

'How can you, Marya Pavlovna? For heaven's sake . . .' said Kisliakof, and at the same time he was annoyed by the way in which he had answered.

To him the reason for the discharge of Marya Pavlovna and Andrey Ignatich was clear, they bore too obviously the stamp of their class distinction, they were, as was all too easy to see, of the intelligentsia and aristocracy, with all their manners and way of thinking. With the coming reconstruction of the system they certainly had to drop out of it. But it was impossible to give them the reason.

Kisliakof felt sorry for Marya Pavlovna when he looked at her distracted face as she gazed around for support and appreciation of her work, as if they could prove helping factors, and he suddenly felt revolted by this violation of ordinary human justice. Really, why should they discard a person if he or she performed the work conscientiously and did no harm by his or her political view point? One really ought not to treat people as though they were mere ciphers, of which one could be discarded and another put in its place. These were human lives—not numbers!

He suddenly realized all the cruelty of such an attitude. And the cause of this was Polukhin, with whom he was so delighted. Just at this moment he did not know on which side he was—on the side of the proletarian communist Polukhin or the aristocratic Marya Pavlovna.

Perhaps on the side of the latter, because he was always affected by injustice. 'This,' he would say to Polukhin or to anyone else, 'is unjust!'

Justice was among those universal things to which Kisliakof had a leaning, and justice must not submit to class principles but must be common to all humanity.

For this reason each offence, each act of injustice, provoked in him a painful reaction and revolt. Such injustices were not peculiar to any particular section, and he had no definite feeling of sympathy with any one side, because they all violated universal justice in their own class interests. The moment he decided that his sympathies were with some persecuted party, then this party became the aggressor and violated every sense of recognized justice. This made it impossible to reach a definite decision, as no party could be relied upon with any certainty.

This question of justice was the chief cause of his vacillation in relationship to the phenomena of life, and it showed itself more distinctly with the present intensified class offensive. He found it simply impossible to palliate the violation of justice, first by one and then by another party.

The Communists oppressed the kulaks. It was absurd to oppress a man because he worked for himself and earned good money, most probably they were good hard-working peasants and not kulaks at all. Give a man the right to do what he liked with his own body, do not make a slave of him. It was simply revolting from the humanitarian point of view.

But when he read in the newspaper that some kulaks had locked a number of Communists in a hut and burned them alive, he was seized with horror and revolt against the kulaks, who, with brutish stubbornness, defended their animal lives, which were devoid of light, culture or progress. Probably these Communists who had been burned alive were honest, self-sacrificing workers, of whom he had met not a few. This again was revolting from the humanitarian point of view, and really, his sympathies could not be on the side of the personal interests of some peasant whose thoughts were only of his own pocket.

His sense of justice reacted to every real fact; it was very variable, and the more unprejudiced he was and the more he looked at things from the humanitarian point of view, the more muddled he became.

In this present instance he noticed that all his sympathies were on the side of Marya Pavlovna and Andrey Ignatich.

He was moved to express his commiseration with these unfortunates, since he himself was fortunately placed, which allowed him to admit the violation of justice and to express his opinion independently of his own advantage—even against it.

'We cannot allow things like this to happen. We must do something. Marya Pavlovna has worked here for ten years,' Kisliakof said excitedly, and he suddenly felt an uncomfortable feeling in his spine. Glancing round, he saw the man in the blue overall standing behind them in the corridor, energetically dusting himself down. He had probably been upstairs, where the old books were stored.

'This matter must certainly be discussed with Comrade Polukhin,' continued Kisliakof, and as the discomfort in his spine increased so his tone lowered.

The comrades dispersed and he went home, but all the way he could not rid himself of the thoughts which centred round one main problem: the present day class cruelty of man to man.

No, this at any rate he could not forgive the Communists. He pictured the stern figure of Polukhin, who, with one stroke of the pen, discharged people merely because they were of another class. He did not even give a thought of how this same Marya Pavlovna was going to live. Probably the same Polukhin, *personally*, would have extended a helping hand to anyone in need, if this unfortunate 'class line' was not drawn across his path, violating humanitarian justice and eliminating pity towards his fellow man. He certainly would have helped, because at heart he was a good man and was indifferent to money and personal comforts. But for these unfortunate victims of class politics he had no pity whatever, no desire to approach them in a human way.

Kisliakof was so deep in thought that he did not notice a man walking in front of him until he nearly collided with him, then he suddenly exclaimed with astonishment and pleasure:

'Well, I never, Nikolai?'

He recognized an old schoolfellow, Nikolai Chumin, with whom he had shared the same desk for several years. He was a tall, good-humoured fellow, known in the past for his gay equable temper, his wide sweeping gestures and way of talking loudly, as if making a continuous speech.

At school he had always been doing something for others—writing essays, translating. When someone had a difficult passage which had to be translated he would approach Nikolai, taking him by the collar of his jacket, and without asking whether he was busy, would push him into a desk to do the work.

Nikolai looked round with astonishment on hearing Kisliakof's exclamation.

'Ah, my dear friend. This is unexpected!'

He was wearing an old straw hat which had a hole in the side.

Kisliakof did not notice this hole until after he had greeted him.

Nikolai was the son of a town priest, and in his tall figure and even in this hat there was something noticeably clerical.

'Well, my friend, this is like old times,' said Nikolai, grasping the hand of his old school friend in his own enormous fist.

'At first I almost did not recognize you.'

'How many years is it since we met? Have you seen any of our old friends?'

'Arkady is here.'

'Ah, the saintly one?'

'He is married, my friend.'

'Well, well! . . .'

When they reached the entrance to Kisliakof's house he felt that he must invite him inside.

'Let us go into my place,' said Kisliakof. 'We can have a chat.'

'Yes, my friend, there is plenty to talk about. It is twenty years since we saw each other.'

They went upstairs. Entering the room with his hat in his hand, the visitor looked round and said, with a shake of his head:

'You are settled comfortably. This is a fine room.'

'Here are some rather good pictures, but we are obliged to keep them behind the cupboard, otherwise there will be gossip about our having fine furniture, and hints that we ought to pay more rent.'

'Yes, these are good, my friend,' said Nikolai, looking at the pictures.

He glanced round the room as if seeking for somewhere to put his hat, with the probable intention of taking off his coat. He had a long overcoat on, which nearly touched the ground and was very warm.

'We will have a bite of something to eat at once,' said Kisliakof, opening the sideboard and peering first into one section and then into another.

'There's no need. Don't trouble. Sit down and let us talk,' said Nikolai, but he watched his friend to see what he would bring from the sideboard.

'But you must,' said Kisliakof, putting plates on the table.

'Things are not too good with me, old fellow,' said Nikolai.

'What! Is that so?' said Kisliakof, and he felt his voice to some extent had lost the joyful animation of the first moment of their meeting.

'They discharged me from my work, and I haven't paid my rent for two months. The wife left me and married some low fellow as soon as she saw that I was unable to support her.'

Kisliakof ceased putting things on the table and listened to what his friend was saying, interpolating from time to time:

'Yes, my friend, that is indeed bad. . . .'

Nikolai began to tell him everything, and Kisliakof listened, thinking that he would probably be obliged to offer him some

financial assistance. But what money could he offer? He had only twenty roubles left, owing to that stupid dinner. There was another fortnight before pay day and before Elena Victorovna returned. Then Tamara might suggest going somewhere. It would put him in a nice position if he had to look round at every moment with the thought that he had not enough money, but some inner voice whispered that he could not look at things in such a way when a dear friend was on the verge of disaster. He must comfort him, nurture him, help him as best he could, even if he had to give him the very last of what he had. That was why he was of the intelligentsia, and not a Communist, to whom the son of a priest is only an unnecessary outsider. Kisliakof himself understood this very well.

'If, shall we say, I give him ten roubles, it does not mean that that will be the end of it now that he knows where I live. If he himself does not come to ask, yet I shall not feel comfortable, knowing that somewhere nearby there is an old schoolfellow in great need. If only he lived in another town,' thought Kisliakof to himself.

'Do you intend to stay in Moscow?' he asked.

'Where is there to go? . . . And I am also ill . . . probably cancer. It ought to be X-rayed, but where will the money for that come from?'

Not until now did Kisliakof notice the sunken temples and bony hands of his old friend.

'There is something wrong with my wife,' said he, pleased that Elena Victorovna also had an illness, although not so long ago, he was annoyed by this illness, in which he did not believe.

'And where is your wife?'

'She is in the country.'

'Oh, my friend, things are very good with you . . . your wife can go into the country.'

'No, really speaking, she is not in the country but with relatives on the Volga. She ought to have gone to Essentuki, but we had no money for that, so she just went to have a short rest. It is really cheaper there than in Moscow. You see, there is not only the wife but her aunt as well.'

He would have liked to mention the dogs, but just managed to restrain himself in time.

The visitor, taking a crust of bread from the plate as if not realizing what he was doing, was chewing it with well-worn false teeth, and talking about his illness, saying that he had not felt it so much before, but now, when he had to go hungry, he had noticed a great change for the worse.

Kisliakof listened and even asked detailed questions; for instance, didn't he feel sick with the pains in his side; while at the

same time he thought to himself that if only he had had thirty roubles he could have given something.

‘Judging from the symptoms I must say that you have no cancer at all,’ said Kisliakof. ‘The best thing for you would be to leave Moscow and get into the fresh air. Haven’t you any relatives?’

‘None at all. I am the only one of our family left. It will end with me. . . . Of all my friends you are the only one I have met . . . you must know what people are like now, once they see you are in need they try to run to one side for fear of meeting you. You rushed with outstretched hands, but others don’t.’

Kisliakof decided that if Nikolai asked he would give him ten roubles, even if he had to face a row with Tamara, who probably imagined after that dinner that he had unlimited means.

But Nikolai made no attempt to ask for money. He only turned the conversation back to his unpaid rent. Chewing a second crust which he took from the plate, he said that if only he could get a chance to earn a little he would manage somehow.

Kisliakof’s cheeks were already burning with shame. He looked Nikolai straight in the eyes as he listened to him, so that it could be seen that he did not avoid the story like those friends who shunned him in the street. He only waited with a beating heart for the moment when Nikolai would say: ‘Talk is all very well, but you let me have ten roubles, my friend.’

Nikolai did not say this, and as each moment passed Kisliakof became more and more troubled.

The visitor sighed, glanced round the room again with wandering eyes, stroked his sunken cheeks with his large bony hands, and, shaking his head, said:

‘Yes, my friend, it is hard. I am glad for your sake that things are not so bad with you.’

Kisliakof put no more questions. He only sat and listened, wondering whether Nikolai would go away without asking for money or not.

Nikolai sat for some time in silence, with bowed head, as if reflecting sadly. It seemed the treatment of his friends who passed on the other side of the road when they saw him had caused him to lose all finer feelings, and now that he had been met so cordially, and had even been invited into the house by his host, he sat on. He spoke slowly, and then became silent.

Kisliakof was also silent, so as not to direct his visitor on to new topics of conversation.

‘What frightens me most of all is that there is some sort of sinner emptiness, if one can say so. I really don’t know . . .’ said Nikolai, stretching out his arms along the armchair. ‘How

many of our fellow intellectuals I have met and found it impossible to open a real conversation with them, so that they talked with radiant animation. . . . What is the trouble? . . . Is it that everyone is empty? . . . that every thing is finished? . . .'

Kisliakof did not answer, otherwise a discussion might have started which would have made Nikolai's eyes shine and would have kept him there until night. But he had to reply in some way for decency's sake, so he shook his head thoughtfully, showing by this that he had thought about it before.

'Everyone is at loggerheads . . . full of hatred. . . . Man has no use for his fellow . . . does not need him spiritually. It is terrible, and the worst of it is that one does not hear a single sincere expression of thought.'

He made a movement as if to get up, probably preparing to go.

'Sincerity is out of fashion nowadays,' said Kisliakof, so that the guest should not go away in silence without hearing at least one word in response.

'Just so!' replied Nikolai eagerly, with renewed animation and pleasure, sinking again into the armchair. 'You are quite right . . . sincerity is not in fashion. . . .'

'Now you must forgive me, my friend, but I have to go out on business,' said Kisliakof suddenly. He even surprised himself and blushed at the thought that his words might have appeared awkward and humiliating. But the visitor was in no way offended.

'Yes go, do go, my friend. I will not keep you. Times are hard now, my friend, and if one lets a moment slip by it takes hours to make it up,' said Nikolai, preparing to go. 'Your greeting was so warm that I became talkative. I have lost the habit of talking in a human way, like brother to brother, with people. My God, what are people coming to. . . . I will just take another small crust. . . .'

'Do take some more. . . . Don't stand on ceremony. . . .' Kisliakof himself began to cut large pieces of black bread, and at the same time blushed as he remembered that he had quite forgotten about luncheon.

'Enough, enough! Stop! Why do you cut so much!' said Nikolai with alarm, chewing the dry bread and waving his hand at his host as if to say that he was showing unlimited extravagance in his hospitality.

'Yes, my friend, an unexpected meeting. . . . The main thing is that you only live a few steps from me. Now, that is enough.' He waved his hand and pushed away the plate like someone pushing away a whole assortment of delicacies after having his full. 'Let us go.'

Kisliakof did not want to go anywhere, he only wanted to find

a way of getting rid of his friend, but as he had said that he was in a hurry he was obliged to go down the staircase with him.

They went out of the door and Nikolai took a look at the house, as if to note carefully its outside appearance. They walked together to the co-operative store at the corner.

'Now you go your way,' said Nikolai, stopping at the corner and extending his hand to his old school friend.

'Good-bye, my dear friend,' said Kisiakof, for some reason pressing the huge hand of his friend of childhood days emotionally. He waited until Nikolai had disappeared round the corner and then returned to his room.

XXXIII

KISLIAKOF HAD OF OLD A LEANING TOWARDS ALL THOSE WHO WERE dissatisfied or perishing; in his talks with them he seemed to get some justification for having left his own vocation and having buried his own higher purposes and ideals, the justification was in that he was not alone but that there were many others similarly minded, who suffered and felt their ruin, and if it was ruin what was the use of talking of higher ideals?

The more the man he met was suffering, the more hopelessly he expressed his thoughts of the future, the greater satisfaction and inner justification Kisliakof got out of it. Then his friendship with Polukhin provided an opportunity for a fundamental change in his position. No longer an onlooker in the background of life, he was now a participant in the festivities. It became his especial delight to establish more and more firmly his connection with the Communists and proletariat, and to estrange himself from the people of the past—'his own.' First, because their whining annoyed him; secondly, because one of his own circle might say that, all the same, some people know how to get on with the Communists in spite of the very definite ideals which they profess; and thirdly, that the Communists might get to know about his suspicious connections with outside elements, which would not do at all.

To the old circle—'his own'—he could say that his beliefs had changed fundamentally (could not a man change his beliefs?), that from now on he was definitely connected with the new regime, not because of the advantages, not because he was afraid of losing the right to exist, not because of a desperate fear of destruction, but owing to a deep and sincere conviction and inner belief. This would have been the absolute truth. He had no ulterior motives or unworthy desire to adapt himself, but rather a joy in his rebirth.

In reality, could anyone say that his feeling for Polukhin was dictated by self-interest. Did the thought ever come to him to betray his new friend and turn his back on him if there should be an unexpected test? No, a thousand times no! The fact that they belonged to different classes only strengthened his feeling of love for him, warmed as it was by the rarity of such contact.

He avoided his own class, too, for he now needed faith in his new belief, which gave him greater justification and a feeling of his own honesty.

He had to believe whatever the cost, and faith came to him

according to his surroundings. If he was surrounded by the intelligentsia, who deplored the perishing of universal ideals, then involuntarily he began to think of these ideals and to see the wrong of class politics—violation of universal truth, suppression of personality, etc.—but if he surrounded himself with Communists he suddenly saw with joy that in history as well as in medical science there happened painful operations, that if from short-sighted pity for the decaying parts of an organism one leaves them to rot, then the whole organism may well perish from gangrene.

But the moment he was away from the Communists a new thought flashed into his mind:

What if this whole epoch was to prove but a regrettable incident in history? And he, having deviated from the eternal path of universal truth, had devoted himself entirely with naive and stupid enthusiasm to something accidental and episodic?

Having lost his own belief, he was now swinging like a pendulum between two extremes, not having the strength to attach himself firmly to either of them. Although he was always telling himself that he must decide once and for all which side he was on and then not to waver or doubt once he had gone over to that side, dozens of times a day he felt this interference with universal truth. But at last he felt clearly and definitely that he was wholeheartedly with the people, and in particular with Polukhin, creating new standards of life.

The moment of decision came when Polukhin referred to him as one of them, and when he began to visit Polukhin regularly and to become closely acquainted with the Communists. At the same time he became persuaded that along with success there proved to be some disadvantage in his present position those intellectuals who objected to any connection with the people in power were the first to approach him for all kinds of assistance when he came into favour. Not one of them condemned him or even hinted at it, but, only said: 'You can help us, since you have powerful influence.' At first it pleased him to help, whenever possible, those who were perishing, but then these people, without resources and homeless, came in such numbers that it became impossible to aid them. At the same time all his Communist acquaintances could say: 'Now, my friend, you seem to have a great many friends among that lot, in what respect do you differ from them?'

Formerly, when meeting some acquaintance who was in trouble, he could sympathize with him, grumble with him and leave it at that, because he himself was similarly situated. Now, when he heard someone who was in difficulties, he wondered what he would ask for—money or influence. It was impossible to help

everyone, and inexpedient to sympathize and condole, since any exhibition of compassion would only produce pleas for more help.

On this account, Kisliakof dreaded meeting a badly dressed person of the educated class. If he saw one in the street in front of him he unconsciously slackened his pace or crossed to the other side of the street, in order to avoid him. It was impossible to pass him without speaking or without expressing sympathy, especially if it was a close friend, but to ask about his circumstances would certainly result in being faced with a request for money or some other assistance.

Therefore, when told a sad story which was not accompanied by a request for help, he expressed the warmest solicitude. The less the assistance required of him, the more readily Kisliakof responded.

He came to the conclusion that to preserve his chance of livelihood he must harden himself to allow his love for his neighbour to be verbal only, that his neighbour must be satisfied with his sympathy without calling on him for material help. If help on any larger scale was needed it was high time, he told himself, that he had no such love—common to all humanity—and did not intend to have any.

If he wished to retain his chance of a successful career he must be ever deaf and blind to the sufferings of others who were perishing, otherwise life would be one long agony and mental torture. Although he had succeeded in pulling through it had been no easy task; others must look after themselves.

He must train himself to be callous and not inconvenience himself for those who demanded help, nor reproach himself because he had secured his own well-being; once arrived at that state he could look any supplicant in the eye and say:

‘Go to the devil. You will not get any more than five kopecks, and not everyone will get that, but only those who go to the length of kneeling in the middle of the street or jumping on me, so that I have no chance of escape.’

But should he by chance encounter some poor old woman who had neither the sense nor the courage to beg, he would avoid passing her, on the excuse that it was no business of his to inquire into the needs of every person who stands silently at the street corner.

XXXIV

THE MAIN QUESTION WHICH HAD TROUBLED HIM LATELY WAS THE possibility of Tamara having a child. She treated this very lightly and it was impossible to get anything definite out of her. At the same time it was unwise to keep on questioning her, for she might one day turn disdainfully to him and say: 'In any case, why do you let the matter worry you so much? Are you afraid that you will be compelled to support your own child?' So he felt that he must find out from Arkady whether they had had any children.

Kisliakof was astonished at Tamara's boldness in relation towards himself. She adopted a sisterly attitude and as if acting on Arkady's first suggestion, made a practice of kissing Kisliakof whenever meeting or parting, talked affectionately and sat with her arm around his shoulders.

'If I adopt a cold attitude I am bound sooner or later to betray myself,' said she to Kisliakof one day when her behaviour had appeared over bold, 'and it would also be more likely to arouse suspicion if I, normally indifferent to you, should remove my arm from your shoulder on Arkady's entrance, while by acting in this sisterly fashion he will get used to it and take absolutely no notice.'

'Do you know, I don't look on him as being a man,' she would sometimes say with gay astonishment to Arkady; 'he is sitting with me now and I can stroke his head as though he is my brother, and even put my hand on his knee.'

'There is nothing strange in that,' Arkady would reply. 'For you are both decent people, with pure minds. It would be strange if it were otherwise, the more so as you know that Hyppolit is more than a brother to me.'

During such talks Kisliakof felt as though someone was pouring cold water down his back, and in addition he had to sit there without moving, in order not to betray his feelings. He was struck with Tamara's enviable absence of any sense of wrong or pangs of conscience for deceiving Arkady, as if she was in no way influenced by the fact that Arkady, being a man of exceptional purity of soul, trusted them both implicitly.

Arkady's fine character and the fact that he was his friend made Kisliakof's relationship with Tamara most painful, since it destroyed the sincerity of his friendship with her husband. If there had not been such a strong and deeply spiritual bond between them things would have been much simpler; as it was.

there was nothing more terrible than when Arkady, suspecting nothing, looked at him with his fine eyes and with solicitude asked him why he was so downcast. He certainly was downcast, because he could not talk, as he used to do, about more serious topics when he himself was false to his friend. And false in what a way!

To Arkady it was a great joy that Tamara was no longer continually running out of the house; she scarcely ever had that tragic expression when she sat for a whole day with her eyes glued on one spot.

'I do not know how to thank you,' he would sometimes say to Kisliakof. 'You have such a beneficial influence on Tamara. It hurt me so much to see her sitting for hours in stony silence. Uncle Misha and young Leva had the same influence on her, but to a smaller degree. Both were goodhearted, but somewhat primitive.'

If Tamara at first kept Arkady by her side when they were all three seated on the couch, restricting him from pacing the room, now she tried by every pretext to rid herself of his presence. At the same time she did this so boldly that Kisliakof really became afraid. She either began to ask her husband if he was going out this evening, or how long he would be away. When Arkady, returning from somewhere, approached her with a tender gesture, she would avoid his caress with a grimace, and say:

'I am tired. Leave me alone.'

When, in spite of this, he kissed her on the head, she pushed him away. It was always Arkady who was kissing her now, not she him, as had been the case before. She only passively allowed it.

It seemed strange to Kisliakof that Arkady, a clever man, did not notice her change towards him. Once a woman becomes passive in her caresses and only submits to them, it certainly means there is something wrong . . . this is an axiom.

Later, she began to show definite signs of irritation whenever Arkady addressed her. She had previously shown an exaggerated tenderness towards him, as though grateful that he allowed her to share his friend, since he served as a uniting link between Kisliakof and her. Now the necessity for this intermediary had disappeared, and with it disappeared her tenderness towards Arkady. Everything he did irritated her. If he did not hear what she said and asked her to repeat it she would say with annoyance:

'If you can't hear very well, sit in such a way that I shall not have to repeat the same thing ten times.'

If Arkady tried to correct her, saying that what she had said was not so, she would pout and ask:

'You suggest that I am lying? . . . That is what I was told.'

'It is not that you are lying, but simply that you were misinformed.'

'I have no wish to be an information bureau,' Tamara would say angrily. 'I repeat what I have heard, but it seems that here at home I cannot open my mouth without being interrupted or asked whether what I say is right or wrong.'

But the most painful scenes were on the grounds of economy.

Arkady would sometimes come in when Tamara was darning her stockings—stockings were her greatest trouble.

'Stop that, why trouble with darning?' he would ask.

Tamara would compress her lips and at first make no reply. Then she would burst out:

'If I had some decent new ones I would not have to darn the old ones. I shall soon have to wear a long skirt in order to hide the holes. All decent women—'

'Now, my dear, my darling, on our means we really cannot pay eighteen roubles for a pair.'

Tamara would be silent and Kisliakof, who was present, would feel as though he was sitting on needles; she probably was thinking how mean he was, could pay thirty roubles for a dinner but could not make a present of a pair of silk stockings to his mistress, who was false to her husband on his account.

And he only had twenty roubles left, owing to that unfortunate dinner. God alone knew how he would find the wherewithal on which to live for the next two weeks until Elena Victorovna returned.

The more Arkady tried to calm her, the more irritable she became.

If, returning home in a good humour, Tamara found them both together, she scarcely gave her cheek to Arkady, but herself kissed Kisliakof, doing this with such obvious preference, with such effusive attention and tenderness, that Kisliakof sometimes involuntarily drew away from her, in order to lessen the possible effects of her ardour. He sometimes felt some annoyance and irritation because she did not think of taking any precautions. His privileged position with regard to Tamara set up an invisible barrier between him and his friend.

XXXV

WHEN KISLIAKOF CALLED ON ARKADY, HE FOUND HIM ALONE, LYING on the couch with his head turned towards the window. He was holding a book in his hands but was looking beyond it. He looked tired and ill.

Seeing his friend, he put the book aside and, taking his pince-nez from his tired eyes, he got up from the couch.

‘So it’s you. . . .’

He greeted his friend, and after pacing the room several times, said:

‘I have just been reading, and thought how unused we have become to having our own thoughts. We are afraid nowadays of admitting the truth to ourselves. We shall soon be quite empty. We are ceasing to believe in the importance and even in the existence of ourselves as units, because everything around us exists in mass form which has no inner substance whatever.’

He stopped, then, after a short silence, continued:

‘We cannot live now without having near us a twin-soul, which can understand everything, even to the innermost depths of what is within us. We, or in other words those who still keep themselves intact in the midst of this noisy current, must unite in a sort of church, so as to preserve *our* truth, the truth common to all humanity, through this epoch, and save it from destruction, see that it does not perish. I believe that the soul of a man, meeting the eternal truth, feels this truth in spite of everything. Nothing can kill this.’

He stood gazing into the distance as he spoke.

‘We must realize that there are times when man loses his inner spirituality, and all that remains is the external, the animal and the mechanical power and capacities, and within—nothing. But I believe that soon man will realize with great anguish that pettiness of external things and will return to his forgotten soul.’

At another time such conversation would have excited Kisliakof’s interest, but he now sat in a state of discomfort. He wanted to ask Arkady before Tamara returned whether they had had any children, but it was impossible to turn this conversation in such a way that he could ask this question.

He listened to Arkady and saw in his every word the idealistic outlook of a man of the educated class. He even felt ashamed when he wondered what Polukhin would think if he could hear this talk about our truth, and ‘anguish’ and the ‘forgotten soul’. For the first time he saw very clearly that Arkady had not only remained in the position of the old days, but had even retroceded;

some long extinct aura of the intelligentsia emanated from him and from the collapse of his life, which turned his thoughts towards religion.

It was impossible to declare this openly to his friend, especially after his mention of a 'church', yet he could not remain silent, showing himself as someone strange, who did not understand or grasp these most intimate thoughts. So he repeated from time to time:

'True,' or, for a change, 'Yes, it is profoundly true.'

'Man will sooner or later remember his discarded soul,' continued Arkady, 'but *their* strength is so great that we (if one boldly admits the terrible truth) have already lost belief in those truths which we considered as sacred things common to all humanity—the moving power of life is love and not strife—the truth is not for one's self only, but for all—even faith in genius appears shadowy under the pressure of this continuous insistence that only *their* ideas have the right to exist, that the future is for them only. In this lies the terrible root of the matter!'

Kisliakof thought of Galahof, with his gloomy monastic appearance and, looking at Arkady, he thought that in every idealist and intellectual there was something monklike, quite unsuited to life.

'The worst of it is,' continued Arkady, pacing the room with slow, long strides, 'that we really are failing and degenerating. Most of us have lost the will to live and do not produce posterity. Since posterity does not concern us personally, license has come into fashion.'

Kisliakof, who sat staring vacantly, awaiting a suitable opportunity for changing the subject in order to put the question which was interesting him, at the last sentence about posterity became alert, like a dozing passenger who hears the bell of a departing train. Arkady even looked at him with astonishment.

'And you . . . have you had any children?' asked Kisliakof.

'No. Tamara has some extreme fear of having a child. This also is characteristic of the generation: woman begins to be afraid of the pains of childbirth, of the discomforts connected with the arrival of a baby, and of the bad housing conditions. Take this house, for example, it is almost exclusively occupied by members of the intelligentsia—scientists, artists and the like—and what happens: in twenty-four families we have one child and eighteen dogs.'

'Our house also is full of dogs,' said Kisliakof. As the question still remained unanswered, he asked:

'And do you not hope to have a child? Your living conditions appear very tolerable.'

‘No. After an operation which Tamara had last year the doctors said she could never have any children.’

He was about to add something, but at that moment his wife came in.

XXXVI

SHE WALKED UP TO KISLIAKOF, JUST AS SHE WAS, IN HER BLUE costume and close-fitting hat lowered over her eyes, kissed him effusively and then presented her cheek to her husband.

Arkady kissed her tenderly several times.

'Wait a moment,' said she, with a grimace. She went into the bedroom and returned in a blue Japanese kimono. She seated herself near Kisliakof on the couch and, putting her hand on his knee, looked at him as though they were alone in the room. Kisliakof made her a sign with his eyes as if to indicate that such behaviour was impossible, and he even moved a little further away from her.

'Go and do some shopping,' she said to Arkady.

'What have I to buy?'

She began to give a list, and Kisliakof did not know what expression to keep on his face, as it was only too obvious that she was getting Arkady out of the way. Tamara even added:

'But don't buy them round the corner, go to the Sretenka. Everything is better and fresher there.'

'Why should I go such a distance, there is always such a queue there. I shall have to wait a long time.'

'Then I will go myself.'

'Now don't be foolish. . . .'

'Then . . . and go to the chemists and get some french chalk.'

She ordered something else, and Kisliakof was wondering all the time how it was that Arkady could not see through it, for she was purposely thinking of things for him to get so that he would be away longer.

When he had gone Kisliakof sighed with relief.

'How can you be so incautious?'

Tamara put her arms round his neck, hung on him playfully, and, looking up at him, said:

'I have told you that the more openly one behaves, the less the man suspects. Then you cannot imagine what a high opinion he has of you. Now let us go in here. . . .'

'That is just why it is so terrible,' said Kisliakof, following her into the bedroom.

'Do you know that I was somehow hypnotically attracted because you were his friend and because for you Arkady's friendship was something prized,' said Tamara, lying on the bed and stroking Kisliakof's hair. 'I was offended by your attitude towards me when you said that you looked on me as a sister; nobody had ever so insulted me before. I remember reading an

old novel in which the hero, unwilling to betray the faith of his friend, killed himself after having fallen in love with his friend's wife. It shows that in spite of friendship it is still possible to fall in love with your friend's wife.'

'I only said that I regarded you as a relation,' said Kisliakof, 'but from the first moment I felt that you would be mine.'

'I noticed that,' said Tamara with a smile. 'What attracted you more than anything else in me?'

'What do you mean by "what"? ' asked Kisliakof, in order to gain time to think of a suitable reply.

'What was the first thing that struck you?'

'What do you think? Guess!'

'I don't know.'

'Of course, my attention was attracted by your eyes. In them I could read of a quiet and intense spiritual life.'

Tamara squeezed Kisliakof's hand gratefully, and already with quite another expression on her face, said:

'But he feels that I have changed towards him, because I shun him in every way, say that I feel tired or am not well. I often see him crying.'

'All the same, you should not treat him as you do.'

'But what can I do? He disgusts me,' said Tamara with irritation.

Kisliakof was pleased in one way that Arkady disgusted Tamara; it meant that he could rest assured that she belonged to him alone, but it suddenly occurred to him that her dislike of her husband might so intensify that she would not be able to live in the same room with him. For this reason he said:

'Still, you must be more tender with him. You must really keep yourself in hand; after all, he is a splendid fellow. Compared with him I have a terrible disposition.'

'You are good enough for me, even with a terrible disposition. Now let us go and sit quietly on the couch.'

Arkady returned with both arms laden with parcels.

'Why did you come back so soon?' asked Tamara.

'Would you have liked me to stay out longer?' said Arkady, gazing at her, and there was not the usual tenderness in his tone.

Examining the purchases, Tamara made no reply. Then she suddenly exclaimed:

'Of course, I thought so . . . there is no French chalk . . . and I can't see any anchovy . . . I knew you would forget something.'

'You did not say anything about anchovy.'

'Yes, I did. I am certain I did.'

'Which means that I am lying,' said Arkady in an offended tone. He even flushed angrily.

Kisliakof moved over from the couch to the window and made it appear that he was looking at the book which Arkady had been reading before he arrived.

'Do open the sardines,' said Tamara to her husband. But he no sooner began to open the tin than she snatched it from him, saying:

'Why do you do it on the tablecloth? Can't you put some paper down, or would it be difficult to go into the kitchen?'

She began to open them herself, putting the tin on a plate, but it slipped from her hand and overturned on the table. A large greasy patch appeared on the cloth.

'Now, you see . . . you have done better, I suppose,' said Arkady.

Tamara threw the tin down and went into the bedroom.

Arkady tried a moment later to go to her, but she stood facing the dressing table, with her back to him, and did not answer what he was saying.

'Leave me alone!' she shrieked at last.

'Go to her,' said Arkady, returning to the dining-room.

Kisliakof went. He seated Tamara in the arm-chair and began to persuade her to control herself.

'My God, can't I be alone with you for a single day,' said she.

'There is nothing to be done . . . now let us go back to him. This may appear suspicious.'

Tamara put her arms round his neck, the wide sleeves of her kimono slipped back. She hung on to him, kissing him on the lips, looking at him with an expression of despair and pain. Kisliakof, feeling that his neck was red under the pressure, tried frantically to loosen her hands and turn her attention to something else. A disturbing thought that she was really beginning to love him flashed across his mind.

Tamara kissed him again and, pushing him away, went with him into the dining-room. Arkady was sitting alone near the window, staring fixedly into the darkness. He did not turn round when they entered.

'Now let us have supper,' said Tamara.

Arkady got up and approached the table. When they started the meal he drank one glass of vodka after another.

'Why did you start that? It is not good for you,' said Kisliakof.

Arkady made no reply.

When Kisliakof went home after supper Tamara, who always saw him out, said when they were in the corridor:

'Can't we meet at your place? I cannot go on like this any longer.'

'Yes, we could, while my wife is away. Come to-morrow,' said

Kishiakof, thinking that her demands were really becoming excessive. One fine day she would be saying that she could live with her husband no longer, and would come to him at the moment when Elena Victorovna inopportunately returned.

XXAVII

THE NEXT DAY KISLIAKOF MADE HIS ROOM AS TIDY AS POSSIBLE AND awaited Tamara's arrival.

All at once he was disturbed by the thought: what would he talk to her about? . . . When they saw each other at Arkady's place they had only a few free moments at their disposal; their *tête-à-tête* were short, and their whole conversation consisted of the inter-change of a few short sentences. Now they would be together for a whole evening.

He would suddenly become as silent as the grave, as happens when the tragic realization comes that there is nothing to talk about, and the painful necessity ensues of making conversation.

It was impossible to start a conversation on some higher theme, on personality or personal aspirations. Ever since life had lost its reality he had found it distasteful to have such talks on higher subjects with women, as they reminded him of things he wished to forget. But woman always demanded of man that he should have inner substance, that he should have enthusiasm and definite ambitions. She always demanded something spiritual in relationships, so that conversations of a religious nature usually ensued. When he was under the disagreeable necessity of having to meet women, he had to listen to their talks about solitude, about the absence of an affinity. What use had he for their souls when he had long ago discarded his own!

Probably Tamara would talk about the impossibility of getting on in life. It would be necessary for him to console her, saying things which he himself did not believe; that a person with talent must always come out on top, that she must only exercise a little patience. He was certain that she had no talent. Sometimes she would pose and, looking at Arkady, who could not take his delighted eyes from off her, would begin to recite poetry. She did it badly, repeating a verse twice and forgetting her words, at the same time speaking so pompously and unnaturally that one felt ashamed for her. Still, she had to be praised for politeness' sake.

If she now took it into her head to recite he would have to praise her and say that she had great talent, otherwise she would be upset and would not allow him to fondle her. The vulgar Pechonkina would be certain to hear. . . .

Tamara herself would think how beautiful and poetical their love was.

The only way to avoid all these hidden dangers—not knowing what to talk about, talk on higher themes and recitations—was by drinking. So he prudently took care to purchase some wine.

Tamara arrived at eight o'clock. She stood in the middle of the room, looked at Kisliakof, and put her arms round his neck. She brought with her a breath of the autumn chill. He took her jacket off and seated her on the couch near the table, where supper was arranged. He uttered whatever tender words came into his head, stroked her legs, and was as animated as possible, in order to avoid being drawn into a long conversation, for he was unwilling to show that he was at a loss for words.

'At last we are alone,' said Tamara. 'For once we can talk with perfect freedom.'

'Though not very loudly,' said Kisliakof, glancing at the partition.

Tamara, throwing her head back and shaking out her close-cropped hair, passed her hand over it and said:

'Do you know, I think I am beginning to despair. I was at the exchange again for six hours to-day, but with no result. Yet I see mere nobodies being engaged; it must be because they know how to deal with people and I have not learned yet.'

Kisliakof poured out some wine. As Elena Victorovna had taken the keys for the top part of the sideboard with her, there were no glasses and they had to drink out of a cup which had no handle.

'And what blackguards!' suddenly exclaimed Tamara, pressing her hands to her head.

'Who?'

'Oh, people in general.'

Kisliakof thought involuntarily that perhaps she had him in mind.

Tamara noticed on the table the Caucasian dagger, which he had used to cut off the metal tops of the bottles, and asked:

'Is it a real dagger?'

'Certainly it is real.'

'Could you *kill* anyone with it?'

'Of course you could, if you stabbed them to the heart.'

'And where is the heart?'

'Just here.' Kisliakof showed her the position under the left breast.

Tamara sighed and pushed the dagger away.

'How I want to live, with all the beautiful fullness of life. My whole terror is that there is nothing there for me! Nothing!' She again pressed her hands to her head.

'What haven't you got?'

'I don't know how to express it.'

Not knowing what to do, but feeling that the conversation was turning to higher themes, Kisliakof poured out some more wine.

Tamara looked at him for a long time. She even took his head

in her hands and turned his face towards her. He did not know what she wanted; perhaps she would suddenly declare: 'I love you, and to-morrow I am coming to live with you.'

'My wife is probably returning to-morrow,' he said suddenly. The words somehow seemed to escape from his lips; he could not think how he had said them.

Tamara did not appear to have heard and continued to gaze into his eyes.

'Do talk to me for once in the way that you talk to Arkady,' she said at last.

Kisliakof became confused.

'Now do have a drink. Why are you so strange with me?' said he.

Tamara bit her lips. With a peculiar smile she looked at the cup with the broken handle, and with a sweep of her hand knocked it from the table. It fell to the floor and broke into small pieces. Somebody moved behind the partition, probably Pechonkina, thought that in the absence of his wife he had brought a girl into the room and she was kicking up a row.

Tamara jumped up from the table; her eyes were rolling wildly in anguish. She stood still and stared straight in front of her.

'What is wrong with you?' asked Kisliakof. Without answering she slowly turned her glance in his direction; then, putting on her jacket, left without a word of farewell.

XXXVIII

POLUKHIN, WITH THE ENERGY AND SINGLE-MINDEDNESS WHICH WERE peculiar to him, was carrying through the reorganization of the museum, changing it from a 'tomb' to an exhibition of historical and revolutionary progress.

The whole museum was turned upside down. All the cases were put together and opened, but soon a clear scheme of arrangement of the exhibits emerged from this chaos.

In doing this he paid absolutely no attention to the past, but left that part of the work to Kisliakof. For him nothing existed but the revolution. The various articles and exhibits only had value in his eyes according to the extent to which they reflected the revolutionary process: the extent to which they were essential to the revolution. To him past history was merely a prologue to the revolution, or, more rightly, something which had impeded it.

Every day he disappeared for several hours, visiting other museums, planning, and sometimes muttering to himself:

'To the devil with that. . . .' or 'No good. . . .'

Almost every day new exhibits were brought to the museum by his instructions; they were often of such a strange character that the old employees shrugged their shoulders.

It was now impossible to see Polukhin in his study; he was rushing about the halls like an army commander in the midst of a battle, completely forgetting that he was—the director; helping the workmen to lift heavy cases and shrieking:

'Go on! Go on! . . . Again! . . .'

His hair was moist and dishevelled, his face was covered with dust.

Often some workman, holding up a heavy article with one hand, would look round and shout to the director:

'Give me the hook. . . . Not that one. . . . The one over there!'

And the director would hand him the hook, watching him anxiously as he hung the exhibit, rushing forward to hold it or to lend a hand.

Polukhin was absolutely devoid of any feeling of vanity or ambition. Whilst fully occupied with the work which filled him with such enthusiasm, any workman, especially one who knew his work well, could tell him to go to the devil if he got in his way and Polukhin would modestly efface himself. But a few moments later he would be rushing forward again and shouting:

'Why did you move it, you idiot! Put it straight!'

To him the work, and only that work which served the revo-

lution, came before everything else. He had no interest in a person as a personality; that meant nothing to him, and he himself never spoke of his private life. He was probably only interested in Kisliakof as a man who could grasp an idea and show enthusiasm. He was to him a man who could appreciate new ideas and in whom it pleased him to confide.

Polukhin possessed the happy faculty of concentration. He could work on the idea which occupied his mind until he had drained it of its every possibility. Whatever he did, his mind was engaged solely by that one thing, and if he talked to anyone at the time he only discussed the work he was busy with, as if expecting everyone else to share his enthusiasm.

In this sense he was not tactful and never considered that his conversation might not interest his companion. All that mattered to him was that the talk interested him and was about his work. He dominated people by his complete disinterestedness, and by his determination, which admitted of no compromise. He entered the museum wearing his double-breasted suit and heavy top boots, and so remained in them; it seemed that it did not matter what he wore or where he lived so long as nothing interfered with his work. He took no pride in his personal appearance and cared little for household furniture. He did not understand beauty and did not consider it to be something necessary to society. He only admitted it when it served the revolution. For instance, he appreciated the work of revolutionary artists during festivals, and in such cases did not spare expense, often spending more than he had a right to do, saying:

'Pay. I shall have to answer for it.'

He looked upon paintings of the old school with indifference and almost animosity.

'What is the use of sketches when one can see for one's self? And these foreigners—what good have they been to us?' he once said to Kisliakof. 'Take this clever painter. I am told they will give money for his works abroad.'

'Which clever painter?'

'The one in the corner hall.'

'Rembrandt?'

'Yes, but what use is he to us? I don't understand him. Pictures are all the same. Neither will the workers understand.'

'But what about learning from him?'

'We can keep one picture as a sample.'

'To speak quite sincerely,' said Kisliakof, feeling that tickling sensation in the spine which he had with every sentence which showed that he shared Polukhin's point of view, 'and to be quite frank, I see nothing unusual in these pictures, myself. Take

Gioconda, for example: how much has been written and said about her—to me it was a complete disillusion.’

‘Now there you are. You feel nothing, so what will a workman feel? Such things may be appreciated, perhaps, by about a hundred people throughout the whole of the Soviet Union. Of what importance is it that they understand? But you must realize we are working away from these old masters, not towards them. Perhaps art will now follow quite a different course and if we try, to learn from these we shall only get confused. Don’t you think I am right?’

‘Probably.’

‘We have now to think about food and about machines. If they will give us machinery for these pictures, then we must use the opportunity. In any case, in time, *everything will be ours.*’

Kisilakof was eager to say that in the life of a people one cannot stop one side of its development arbitrarily and give preference to another without courting disaster: they could not turn the whole country into an agricultural school and stop the development of art and philosophy because they *now* wanted only machinery.

But Polukhin was a Party man and Kisliakof non-Party. If he, whom they believed to be one of themselves, expressed such thoughts, it would force Polukhin to be on his guard and, perhaps, to say:

‘I thought that you understood things in the Marxist way, but you are expressing the intellectual ideas.’

Kisliakof, as if by instinct, sensed when his disagreement with Polukhin would be dangerous. When it was not so he always contradicted him, and an observer could see that here was a man of strong convictions, but that such convictions were trained along the lines of Marxism. On the other hand, in his disagreement it was impossible to trace any hostility.

WHEN KISLIAKOF ARRIVED AT THE MUSEUM AFTER HIS unsuccessful meeting with Tamara, Polukhin greeted him with the words:

'I have been to one of the museums.'

'With what result?'

'No good at all. They have the whole revolution depicted in photographs, drawings and diagrams. Who on earth, if he is in a hurry, will try to decipher these diagrams? They ought to be arranged so that if one passed without stopping one could see immediately all that there was to see, so that the exhibits would hit you in the eye,' said Polukhin, illustrating his meaning with an abrupt movement with the palm of his hand. 'How many rags are hung about to present the history of the Tsars. Here is a whole carriage. Whose is it?'

'Peter the First's'

'There you are! If they had here even the old trousers of some revolutionary, or his inkstand . . . otherwise it must appear that they were not living people but shadows, and that nothing lived after them but pictures. My friend, I have at last found something! Something great!'

'What is it?' asked Kisliakof, assuming at once an expression of intense interest: he could not remain indifferent and disappoint Polukhin.

Polukhin silently approached a case and opened the door:

'Look!'

Kisliakof went over and saw a stump of a wooden log with a hook screwed into it.

'What is it?'

'There you are. What is it? You must find out.'

Kisliakof shrugged his shoulders with an astonishment which he knew to be exaggerated, and was even inwardly pleased with his inability to understand.

'People were hung on this; it is cut from the gallows.'

Kisliakof experienced a disagreeable feeling in his spine and stared with inexplicable curiosity at the hook.

'What? Can you feel it?'

'Yes, I can feel it,' answered Kisliakof, and perhaps subconsciously he continued to exaggerate his feelings in order that Polukhin's expectations should not be disappointed.

'That is what has to be collected to show the history of the revolution—not pictures! Something else will be brought here soon.'

A technical employee entered the study and said:

'They have brought it, Comrade Polukhin.'

'Ah, that is excellent. Let us go. Drag it in here,' he shouted to the carters as he ran down the staircase.

The carters hoisted a heavy log on to their shoulders. It proved to be a beam from under a loft and had been damaged by shell fire in three places. It had been sawn from the loft of a Moscow house.

'Here you have the Moscow insurrection. You can even touch it with your hands.'

Polukhin was as pleased with this beam as an archæologist is with the finding of a five thousand year old antiquity.

'Do you understand what you have dragged in here?' he asked one of the carters, who had the ends of his large overall tucked into his belt.

'We brought it from the Presna. Anybody would know what it was,' said the carter.

'And that's just what we are aiming at. So that everybody knows what these exhibits are.'

The next day the actual iron bars of the cells of the Schlüsselburg fortress were brought, and a real cell was erected, with papier mâché prisoners. It was purposely erected on the lower basement floor, which was poorly lit. Everyone who went there felt this poor lighting, the depressing vaults and the chill of the stone walls with a foreboding of something terrifying, something which was realized in the appearance before one's eyes of a stone cage, illumined by the dull light of an oil lamp. Here was the quietness of the tomb. The curious visitor involuntarily became silent, and with an indefinable feeling of dread, gazed at the narrow iron bed near the wall, the table, and high up, near the ceiling, the iron grating which served as a window.

When at the table they placed the figure of a man dressed in grey, with a wax face, Polukhin cried:

'Place him with his back to us.'

The impression which one got by seeing the bent back and part of the cheek in the dull tomb-like light, with the wax face, unnaturally straight hair, moustache and glassy eyes half-hidden, was almost the same as that given by a glance at the hangman's hook.

Polukhin neglected nothing, however trifling. He was quick to seize Kisliakof's ideas and to carry them further than Kisliakof himself could have imagined, and it pleased Kisliakof to be able to tell the director this. With endless perseverance Polukhin tried to discover all the everyday small trifles which had any connection with well-known revolutionaries.

'I think I shall levy a tax on the commissars,' he said one day.

'I shall tell them that they can do what they like, but they must give their hats, trousers and inkstands to the museum.'

The museum was expanding. The porcelain, which had previously been contained in innumerable glass cases, was removed to the storeroom, and all that was retained was one sample of each to show the table decoration of the Tsars and nobles at one or another period. Adjoining these was placed a peasant's table.

'We must construct relativity of history before anything,' Polukhin would say. 'I would have a special building erected for the epoch of the revolution, but I would connect it with this one. It would be made in the American style, with a glass roof.'

'That would not do, quite a different style,' said Kisliakof, feeling that he could express his complete disagreement with the director without risking his own reputation.

'It would be quite as well to have a different style. Isn't the revolution quite a "different style"?''

'I quite understand that, but it won't turn out right. Every man with taste will laugh at us.'

'Oh!'

'It's quite true.'

'Then very well; you see it better than I do, but it would have been fine, all the same,' said Polukhin somewhat regretfully, after a moment's silence.

Kisliakof could not be shaken in matters connected with taste. He did not even try to argue with Polukhin, but with some indifference and self-assurance would simply say: 'It will not do.'

Polukhin, who felt and admitted his weakness in this direction, always agreed with him; he was even docilely obedient, as if their positions had been reversed and that Kisliakof had changed from subordinate to chief.

He valued this opportunity of expressing his thoughts abruptly and categorically, because in matters of taste his disagreement could not have the taint of Menshevik tendencies or lack of knowledge of the principles of Marxism, and he was in this case despotically intolerant. This even gave him an impression of the freedom of his own opinion and a feeling of human dignity; the sense of his absolute dependency would disappear. At such moments even his gestures would change: he would wave his hands with annoyance at Polukhin when the latter made some suggestion which was ridiculous from the point of view of educated taste. All this gave Kisliakof a feeling of greater, almost exalted, love for Polukhin. He would even tell his friends what a wonderful man the director was.

If the theoretical side was in question, then Kisliakof either agreed or expressed more extreme *left* views than even the Com-

munist Polukhin himself. The latter would be astonished that a non-Party man could have such extreme views.

'Why, you ought to be a Communist,' he would sometimes say.

'I feel myself to be a Communist: a Party ticket doesn't mean everything.'

He sometimes even warned the director when, carried away by his enthusiasm, he was taking steps which were risky from the Party point of view. Once he told him that he ought to pay more attention to the scouts' union and give them a special report on the progress of the reorganization.

'We can read reports later, it is the work which has to be done now. You make them work.'

'The work must be done, but a report also ought to be given.'

In saying this he felt in his concern for Polukhin quite a disinterested attachment, such as a nurse feels towards the child in her charge.

Polukhin once said:

'Certainly it is no good from the Party point of view, but, upon my word, I have more confidence in you than in any of our own people. Now take the union—Maslov likes to play a part, but I have no use for him. If they transfer me do not think that I shall forget you.'

'And I shall never forget you, because you have made it possible for me to understand the essence of the revolution and its pathos as no one else could have done. In working with you I have felt myself to be a man in the full sense of the word. You saw, better than myself, what I was capable of and forced me to do it. Without you I should even now have been sitting occupying myself with a lot of old rubbish,' said Kisliakof.

XI

RETURNING FROM HIS WORK HE SAW THAT THE DOOR OF HIS room was open. His heart sank as he thought that he was being deprived of his home owing to the activities of the Budenny Detachment.

When he entered the room he came face to face with Elena Victorovna. She had returned a whole fortnight sooner than had been arranged. Having already changed into a sleeveless house dress, she was stooping over an open case, unpacking. The first thing Kisliakof's eyes rested on were her arms: fat, fleshy and red, with rough elbows.

Jerry rushed towards him with a joyful bark, jumped up and pawed at his stomach. The bulldog only glanced at him shiftily and turned away, as if this was not the master on whom his whole existence depended, but only a dependent of himself and Elena Victorovna, with whom there was no great need to be on ceremony.

Elena Victorovna turned quickly on hearing her husband's footsteps, rushed to him and, kicking Jerry aside, threw her fat arms round his neck.

'At last! Alive! Well! Thank God. Thank God!'

She continued to hold her husband, and he felt, with a sense of strangeness and novelty hitherto unnoticed, the pressure of her stout stomach, which prevented him from moving.

'I don't know what happened to me,' said Elena Victorovna, seating herself on a chair with her legs wide apart like any vulgar woman (this Kisliakof also noticed, although he could not remember having seen it before). 'I do not know what happened to me. I was tortured by premonitions and have been imagining goodness knows what. I was so anxious about you that I could not stay away a moment longer. I left everything and came back.'

In her excitement she got up from the chair and sat on the couch near Kisliakof, and continued: 'Can you believe that as I was coming from the station I trembled as though I was afraid, and when an ambulance passed me in this street I even screamed.'

'How foolish you are,' said Kisliakof, stroking her fat hand as though grateful for her love and forgiving her childishness.

'I have been thinking that returning late one night from your friend you would be attacked in some dark turning.'

'I only visited him once, but then I am quick enough. Don't you remember me beating off those people who attacked me in '19?'

Elena Victorovna looked at him with a smile, she did not appear

to be listening to what he said, but was only happy to know that the man she loved was sitting before her alive and unharmed.

'And you have been lonely without me? You are glad that I have come back?'

'Of course. How can you ask?'

'How glad I am that I am back with you. I have been thinking of all the evenings we shall be together, we will often go to the theatres. This absence has only made my love the stronger, and really it was terrible there. People everywhere, especially on holidays. I cannot stand crowds.'

Elena Victorovna said that she had seen Madame Zvenigorodsky: she had won the case over the room and her husband had been ejected. Then she said that the husband had taken away, or, more truly, stolen from the dresser all the gold and diamond trinkets that he had given to his wife, and that they were now fighting about the furniture, as he had lodged a claim in court that it all belonged to him.

'Think of all the shame of this, and yet they are people of the intelligentsia, of cultured upbringing. It makes one afraid to be alive. I cannot understand it. Go as a washerwoman, as a charwoman, but don't submerge your soul in the quagmire of petty legalities.'

Elena Victorovna clasped her hands on her knees and was silent for some time.

'Is it possible that there is nothing precious left in the world except possessions, material things? I remember being struck by a sentence in *Anna Karenina* when she thinks with shame that Vronsky may say to her when divorcing her: "How many roubles do you want?"'

'And now people snatch; steal from each other things which they have previously given as presents: go to court to get possession of a room. . . . What is it? How can one describe it?'

'Natauson has bought his wife a sable. I should like to know how they manage it. To-day they are having visitors, all sorts of dishes—nearly a bucketful of caviare, turkey and sturgeon. They pay as much as we do for their room. . . .'

Kisliakof nodded his head animatedly as he listened to his wife, but at the same time the thought flashed across his mind that he must find a way of letting Tamara know that his wife had returned. Then he felt some irritation with his wife for having rushed back for no reason. And now she wanted to go to theatres and sit with him every evening. It meant that he would have to invent all manner of pretexts in order to meet Tamara.

'Do you know, I was greatly perturbed about the things I gave her to keep safe . . . what could I do? . . . One can expect anything nowadays, but thank God they were safe. She returned

them at once without any question.' I have become considerably thinner, don't you think so?' said Elena Victorovna in another tone. She got up and pirouetted. 'Marya Semenovna, who just met me, was quite surprised.'

Kisliakof was always astonished at the trustful way in which she accepted what her acquaintances said about her becoming thinner or looking younger. It was about time she knew that it was merely a matter of politeness with women, when meeting, to say:

'How well you look! You look ten years younger!'

She herself often said such things to her acquaintances and returning home would tell her husband: 'I met Marya Semenovna; she is so stout that she looks a fright. I told her that she looked splendid and had got much thinner, and was even afraid that she would think I was being sarcastic. But not all, she smiled and was quite pleased.'

'And how do you think I look?'

'You look wonderfully younger and fresher.'

'That is the fresh air, said Elena Victorovna, and she added in quite a different tone: 'Now I am at home. How glad I am that we are together again. And how do you stand with regard to money?'

Kisliakof knew that he must expect this question and that he must prepare for it by finding reasons for his expenditure. In the way of people of the educated class, he neglected matters connected with money and could never force himself to budget in advance, which would have enabled him to disguise the cost of that stupid dinner. He had thought of doing this during the evening, as he had not expected Elena Victorovna to ask the question so soon, more particularly after her talk about the joy of being with him.

For this reason he said somewhat confusedly:

'Not very well. . . . I have only fifteen roubles.'

'How only fifteen roubles? But I left you a hundred.' A look of displeased astonishment appeared on her face.

'What is a hundred roubles! Look at the time that has passed.'

'Very little time has passed . . . only half the time I went away for . . . two weeks.'

Her expression changed from one of love and pleasure to the cold astonished face of the housewife.

'Two weeks is not such a short time,' said Kisliakof suddenly. He felt angry and irritated with this woman absolutely of no use to him, who, without any consideration for him, could spend *his* money on herself, and in addition required him to give a report of every kopeck he spent.

'Have you bought something?'

'No, nothing in particular.'

'Then I cannot understand it. If you haven't bought anything,

how have you spent eight-five roubles in a fortnight?' said Elena Victorovna, shrugging her shoulders, and as she liked exactness above everything, she immediately began to reckon up: 'Food cost you two roubles a day at the most, that amounts to twenty-eight for the fortnight. Is that so?

'Yes,' said Kisliakof, thinking to himself that food had cost him twenty-eight roubles for *one* day.

'But where did you squander the rest? Have you lost it?' She was already agitated and upset.

Kisliakof tried to remember or to invent ways in which it was usual to spend money. But his annoyance caused him to forget everything but the dinner, about which he was afraid to tell Elena Victorovna, as she would be dumbfounded on hearing that he had managed to spend thirty roubles on one dinner.

'Is it possible that I am not to be allowed for once to live as I like?' said he, feeling that he had turned pale and that serious and perhaps irreparable things might immediately ensue.

'Live by all means. Who prevents you?' said Elena Victorovna, without noticing his changed expression. 'But do you know how you spend your money? All I am saying is that you do not know!'

On all occasions of this kind Kisliakof felt defenceless, because he really could not say in what way the money had been spent. Now he was unable to do it, not because he did not know, but because it was spent on forbidden things, and he was obliged to act as a stupid and careless spendthrift.

If this was the case, she was quite entitled, for his own sake, to take all his money away from him and demand an account, and for this reason he had for a long time beforehand to think of some pretext when he needed money for things which were forbidden.

'I have told you more than once that I am only against spending without some reason or object. It always brings unexpected complications. I have every kopeck planned out a month beforehand,' said Elena Victorovna. Her arms were raised as if imploring someone: 'With him fifty roubles disappear and no one knows where. So you can waste it and then are surprised that I refuse to go to Essentuki.'

'Ah, so that's the trouble,' thought Kisliakof angrily. 'She wants to get enough to take her to Essentuki, where she can breathe fresh air and get thinner. In any case, this is open and logical.'

Suddenly he was struck by a happy thought:

'Now, it had quite escaped me!' said he. 'I met an old school-fellow, who was in terrible straits, and I gave him twenty-eight roubles.'

Elena Victorovna was silent for some time. She only shrugged her shoulders. Then she said:

'This is not the time to give people sums like that. Nowadays we have to look round for the best way of keeping ourselves alive. You gave him the money and I don't know where we shall get any from in order to live until the end of the month.'

Kisliakof wanted to say something particularly cruel in reply, as, for example:

'Certainly, how can you know when you only know how to get ready money from me? And why am I obliged to give it to you? Nobody knows. In this case you must be grateful for my "carelessness" which causes me to give you the money. It seems to me that you only want the money, not me.'

But he did not say this. Instead, he got up hurriedly from the couch and threw himself down at the writing desk, his hands pressed to his head, showing that such disagreeable topics were enough to make his head burst.

Elena Victorovna, standing in the middle of the room, followed him with her eyes.

'What are you doing this for? Don't you want to listen when someone is talking to you?'

Kisliakof was silent; he ruffled his hair excitedly.

'I must ask you to drop this hysterical manner which you have adopted just lately. I am managing the house and have the right to *demand* an account from you, so that I know what I have to spend every month.'

Kisliakof decided that whatever she said, he would not answer another word. But he could not restrain himself, and said with intended cruelty:

'How nice it has been while you have been away. For a whole month I have not had to listen to any shouting.'

He knew he was not speaking the truth, because Elena Victorovna was not shouting but was speaking rather quietly, but he wanted to hurt her the more deeply.

When the aunt returned from her shopping they were seated in silence at opposite sides of the room. Kisliakof, his head in his hands, was staring intently at the statuette of Karl Marx which stood before him on the writing desk and Elena Victorovna, her eyes red with crying, was nervously tugging at her wet handkerchief in her lap.

Kisliakof did not even greet the aunt, and she drew back and tiptoed behind the screen. He sat there, and, as though solving a difficult mathematical problem, planned some excuse for going to Arkady's house that day. He was disturbed by Tamara's behaviour. She had not telephoned to him once since the meeting, and alarming and jealous thoughts were beginning to enter his head.

He suddenly got up, moving the arm-chair so noisily that Jerry, who was sitting near, began to bark shrilly and ran for safety.

under a chair, and the bulldog, who was lying on the arm-chair, eyed him suspiciously. Kisliakof took his cap and overcoat and without saying a word went out of the room.

But Elena Victorovna overtook him in the passage.

'If you want to cause a row on the first day of my return,' said she in a quiet voice, 'you can, but first of all be good enough to leave me some money.'

In nervous haste and without thinking of the consequences of such a step, Kisliakof gave her ten roubles, leaving himself with five.

'Take it . . .' said he, and went to Arkady.

XLI

THERE HAD RECENTLY BEEN A GREAT CHANGE IN ARKADY. HE WAS now usually silent, as if oppressed by something. It was impossible to say whether he had learned of the real state of affairs between his wife and his friend.

In any case Kisliakof could not ask, with a clear conscience, what was wrong with him and why he was so downcast. He had to make it appear that he noticed nothing, but this also could prove just as suspicious to Arkady. Why was his friend so insensitive that he did not notice this change? . . .

So every time he called to see Arkady he found it painfully uncomfortable to converse with him.

Kisliakof saw by the fact that Arkady had started to drink and by his fixed unnatural smile that he had perhaps some idea of how matters stood. . . . But as he was silent, Kisliakof made it appear that he saw no change in his friend.

He found it painful to be left alone with Arkady; he could not talk about 'perishing,' because, owing to his friendship with Polukhin, he was not perishing. Against his will there flashed through his mind the thoughts which a successful man has towards a failure.

There was also a noticeable retrogression in Arkady's outlook: he leaned so much to the right, even to religion, that at first, when he thought that he himself was perishing and was grasping at every negative thought, Kisliakof had been able to talk to him. Now he could not even listen to him seriously, but could not tell him so. One thing was certain: he was now definitely a left-winger. He did not speak on higher subjects either, for another reason: Arkady might by chance get to know about his affair with Tamara (if he did not know already), and at the height of such a talk might utter such a sentence:

"All the same, what a blackguard you are, you talk of high ideals, and under my very eyes misconduct yourself with my wife. . . ."

For this reason he instinctively avoided lofty themes, in order that if anything did happen there would not be too humiliating a contrast between his words and actions.

He ceased to feel any pangs of conscience from the moment when, under the influence of the fundamental changes in his life, the similarity of their positions disappeared.

Kisliakof even compelled himself to develop such a picture of his friend, as the less one respects a man and the less one has in

common with him in things which matter most, the less one feels in the wrong before him.

He now tried not to call when Tamara was out. When he arrived his eyes first of all searched his friend's face jealously for signs of his humour. If he was downcast Kisliakof sighed with relief; it meant that Arkady was worried by Tamara's coolness towards him; which in turn meant that he—Kisliakof—could be certain of her.

When Kisliakof entered he found that Tamara had not returned and that Arkady was alone. He was wearing an old house jacket which was too short for him, the sleeves were worn at the elbow. He was standing near the window, shaking some liquid in a tube and holding it up to the light.

'Good evening,' said Kisliakof.

Arkady shook hands with him in silence and resumed his shaking of the liquid in the tube. Kisliakof noticed that he smelled of drink, but did not speak about it.

'Isn't she at home?' (For some reason now they always referred to Tamara in the third person).

'No, she has not returned. . . .'

'You are always at your experiments,' said Kisliakof, taking a book from the window and glancing through it in order to avoid his friend's eyes.

'Yes.'

Arkady put the tube in the rack and sat in the arm-chair, gazing at the floor and stroking his knee with his hand. They were silent for some time.

'Has she been out long?'

'She was not in when I came home. She goes out every evening. . . .'

Suddenly, as if controlling himself with an effort, he looked at his friend, and his own face became somehow guiltily pitiful, as across it appeared to flash a decision to say something important and painful.

Kisliakof's heart trembled at the thought that Arkady was annoyed with him.

'Things are bad with me, my friend,' he said, smiling a sad, forced smile.

'What is the matter?' asked Kisliakof in astonishment, taking off his pince-nez, as if Arkady's words were quite unexpected and inexplicable, and he looked him boldly in the eyes, as he understood by the word 'friend' that Arkady was far from having any suspicions of him.

'Bad, my friend,' repeated Arkady. 'I feel that with our arrival in Moscow something snapped. There, in the provinces (only now do I realize how happy I was), she was quieter. I was happy in

her love and in the friendship of splendid people, Uncle Misha and young Leva. It is true that she sometimes had a longing for the more splendid life which she had missed, but the longing passed quickly. Our arrival here revived it; the impossibility of entering this life and expressing her individuality made it stronger. The capital is exciting her, attracting her with its unattainable dreams and the temptations which are always close at hand. There is no moral support for her in the company of these friends, girls of twenty years. You understand, I am not deceiving myself,' said Arkady, with a blush. 'I do not deceive myself and am not definitely certain that Tamara will always love me as she does now. I do not forget that on the first of October I am forty and she is only twenty-five. I know that it may happen that she will meet some other man and leave me. I only implore the Creator that this may be long deferred, but because she is upright and honest she will tell me about it, breaking it as gently as she can. But . . . in this case no gentleness will help.' With a bitter smile, stretching out his arms.

'You know that with a Russian man of the educated class, when his inner life has collapsed and he no longer has any spiritual place in life, the only thing that remains is the sacred love of a woman. In these days in which we are living, when all the best beliefs of the cultured are perishing, this already represents the *last* sacred thing. . . . Yes, the last.' He was silent for some time.

'I said that she might fall in love with someone else. . . . I said this so that you should not laugh at me, at my conceit. But I have an inner belief that she will not betray me, not take away the last thing. I believe that she, putting an end to this rushing about in search of the fulfilment of her own life, will suddenly see me near her as the purpose of her life. The self-sacrifice of a Russian woman is a great thing, and it may happen that my little one will see the great purpose of carrying this cross, to live with an old husband whose spiritual spine is broken and with her warmth replace that which has been lost. Yes, she will give me this solace and I shall then be able to say: "I still believe in the greatness of soul of the Russian woman, who remains true to herself through all conditions of life".'

. Arkady was flushed and his eyes were glistening.

'The thought that we shall spend our lives together keeps me alive. In addition to a wife I have also a friend. You will not believe how I have appreciated the time when we have been sitting together on the couch. She seemed to quieten down and stayed in the house. She again became tender towards me: I watched her eyes glisten when she talked to you. . . . And now again . . . always worse and worse . . . and what is worst of all is that she

is surrounded by the unhealthy atmosphere of a degenerating class and by people who have neither ideals nor social future.

‘What are the characteristics of degeneracy?’ continued Arkady, getting up and beginning to stride up and down the room.

They heard a woman’s quick footsteps in the passage, and Tamara opened the door and entered the room.

XLII

'AH, YOU ARE HERE?' SAID SHE, AS THOUGH KISLIAKOF'S PRESENCE was unexpected.

'Yes. My wife has returned,' said he somewhat confusedly.

Kisliakof, thinking all the time that it was necessary to warn Tamara of the arrival of his wife, was so filled with this thought that, without expecting it himself, he said it at the first moment.

'Ah, is that so?' said Tamara. 'Has anyone telephoned?' she asked Arkady. She spoke in the abrupt tone of a business person, who, on returning home, asks first of all whether there is any news of business matters.

'No. Whom did you expect to ring?'

Tamara made no reply and went into the bedroom, where she remained for quite a long time, during which both friends sat in silence, having lost the thread of the conversation and each in his own way feeling the proximity of her presence.

The telephone rang.

Tamara ran quickly out of the bedroom and took the receiver away from Arkady, who was about to answer.

Leaning with her back to the wall and facing Arkady and Kisliakof, she began to talk, swinging her leg and looking at her husband and Kisliakof with the vacant stare which one has when engaged in conversation on the telephone. This glance, for some inexplicable reason, always irritates and offends the one on whom it rests, because it seems to him that at this moment he ceases to be an interesting and dear person.

'Then very well,' said Tamara, agreeing to something. 'I must say that you have been persuading me for over a week that this will be excellent. Very well, we shall see. I will come.'

'What is it? An offer?' asked Arkady.

'Oh, nothing special,' answered Tamara, without looking at him. She moved about the room with the preoccupied appearance of one desirous of avoiding interrogation.

For some reason or other Arkady was summoned to the institute.

A strange expression flashed across Tamara's face, and she said: 'Don't go. I don't want you to go out.'

'My dear, they have sent for me and I cannot refuse.'

He went.

Kisliakof looked at Tamara for a long time in silence. She was standing fussing about with the work basket in front of the

window. He felt that she would be astonished at his silence and would ask him why he did not speak, but she did not ask.

'Why are you so strange to-day?'

'I am the same as I am always.'

'No, not the same.'

Kisliakof went over to her and kissed her on the cheek. She stood passive, without moving away or making the slightest step towards him.

'What is the matter?' asked Kisliakof.

'What do you mean?'

'You have changed.'

A sudden jealous suspicion crept into his head.

'You do not love me?' asked he. His heart began to throb at this question.

'What makes you think so?' said Tamara, and she added quietly, almost with a shade of impatience: 'I am tired and I do not feel very well.'

'Why do you move away from me?'

Tamara stroked Kisliakof's head and said with a sigh:

'How is it that you don't understand that the trouble is not what you think, but that I simply feel depressed? I was promised an engagement last week, but again—nothing. Then I am sorry for Arkady; he worries so much. I know I am to blame, for I have spoiled your friendship.'

'That worries me, too, but I did it because of my love for you,' said Kisliakof, feeling irritated and impatient with her languid indifference and the appearance of these signs of repentance.

'I did not know that my coolness would affect him so greatly, and now it seems that it will be the end of him.'

Seeing that words were of no avail, Kisliakof tried to embrace her, but she stood awkwardly near the window and would not move from it.

'Don't . . . he may be back at any moment. . . .' said Tamara, when he tried to move her away from the window.

'You do not love me?'

'Why do you think so?' said Tamara in annoyance. 'I am merely preoccupied. They promised to-day to introduce me to a cinema producer at the theatre. Perhaps something is going to happen at last. Why can't you understand how worried I am?'

'So . . . you still love me?' said he, trying to look into Tamara's eyes.

'Of course I do,' answered she.

Kisliakof was reassured by these words. He decided that with his remaining five roubles he would go and buy wine, which would disperse the gloomy atmosphere, and then everything would be as usual.

'Do take me to the theatre,' said Tamara. 'I have to meet the cinema producer there.'

Kisliakof went hot and cold; it was rather difficult to do this with only five roubles.

'Very well,' said he, but he felt quite uncomfortable.

'I will go and get ready.'

Tamara went into the bedroom, then ran out to fetch a needle and some thread. Kisliakof sat alone for some time and then, with the right of an intimate friend, approached the bedroom and was about to open the door. But Tamara, who was seated near the dressing table with a stocking in her hand, hid it quickly behind her back and screamed hysterically:

'You can't come in.'

In her voice was the note of irritation with which she sometimes screamed at Arakdy.

Kisliakof felt a pang of offence. He realised that she was probably darning her silk stockings and did not wish him to see her doing this.

'Bring me the scissors or a knife,' shouted Tamara.

Kisliakof could not find either and he passed his dagger through the slightly opened door.

She returned from the bedroom fully dressed. Kisliakof purposely stood with his face to the window and did not turn round to her, so that she should know that he was offended.

But without approaching him Tamara simply said:

'Now let us go.'

He did not reply.

She went over to him and stroked his head.

'So you love me just the same?' He could not help asking this.

'Of course I love you. I am only tired of this dull life,' added she, as if wishing to justify her rudeness.

XIIII

KISLIAKOF WAS SEIZED WITH FEAR WHEN THEY LEFT THE HOUSE: HE had only five roubles and some small change in his pocket. With difficulty this would be enough to pay for the cheaper seats, but it would be impossible to take a cab.

At another time he could have spoken jokingly about it, but now, with Tamara in such an irritable mood, she would scarcely see the point of the joke. Her escort was in as poor a condition as her stockings.

His whole thought was to keep this balance and not be turned away from the pay box of the theatre in disgrace.

'What glorious air,' said he, inhaling the fresh evening air. He did this to make an excuse for walking. 'It is still early and it is simply awful to travel in our cabs.'

'There is a motor car,' said Tamara.

Kisliakof looked round with fright, but he immediately sighed with relief:

'It is an official one.'

He was seized with anger against his wife, who had placed him in such a position. The first thing when she arrived—money. If he had the ten roubles which he had given to her he would not be in this plight! It was not pleasure but definite torture to think at every moment that he would not have enough money. And he could not speak about it to his companion.

Tamara was probably thinking: 'If he was a real man he would have called a smart cab and would have made himself amusing on the way.'

To think that before the revolution he was earning eighteen thousand roubles a month. . . . Had he been single even now he would have had some spare money: two roubles was quite enough for food, which with twenty-five for lodgings, ten for washing and another twenty-five for incidentals would leave him with eighty.

He was surprised by his calculations and the dismal thoughts which, against his will, had seized him, that they reached the theatre in absolute silence.

The tickets were two and a half roubles each, and he had some small change left over in his purse; about a rouble so far as he could judge by feeling it with his hand in his pocket.

He had his hand fumbling in his pocket when they went into the foyer before the performance and consequently gave wild and absent replies to Tamara's questions, trod on the heels of the ladies,

and stalked on in front without noticing that his companions had turned back. Suddenly realizing this, he turned round confusedly and began to look for her.

He counted one rouble and forty kopecks, provided that the coins were twenty-kopeck pieces and that there were copper kopecks among them.

When the performance started Tamara stared avidly at the stage; she watched every movement of the actors, leaning first to the right and then to the left, in order to see better beyond the broad-shouldered, bald-headed man who was sitting in front of her.

The scene on the stage was a Parisian boulevard with a café on the right. There were girls made up smartly as *demi-mondaines*, wearing extraordinary hats—they walked about or sat down with their legs crossed, with cigarettes in their well-manicured hands and their little fingers crooked. Probably illustrative of the decay of Europe.

It was obvious that Tamara was affected to a considerable degree by what she saw on the stage. Once she even leaned on Kisliakof's shoulder and said:

'I want to go to Paris . . . will you take me?'

'Yes,' answered Kisliakof quietly.

He pressed her hand, as if to convey that not only would he take her to Paris, but anywhere she liked.

'I want to go in an express train. I hear that there are wonderful hotels in Paris, furnished like palaces, and that the women are all dressed in silk and *crêpe de chine*. We will go all over the place and see everything.'

She again pressed tenderly against him, and he responded in the same way, thinking at the same time that he would certainly have to offer her some tea, but that before doing this he would have to make sure how much he really had in his purse. Should he ask her during the first interval or the second? The second would be better, otherwise she would want some more before the end, which would be a catastrophe.

However cold and indifferent she was to him, as she leaned against his side the more he felt his need of her, and in order to keep her leaning there he had to satisfy her craving for excitement by talking about Paris, thereby giving her the idea of his unlimited financial possibilities.

Such were the fatal crossroads—her imagination of his considerable financial means and the dark truth in the shape of silver coins in his pocket, which might yet prove to be copper.

During the interval they walked arm in arm in the foyer. Tamara was drait; she seemed to have no connection with her companion, and the whole time was searching the passers-by with her eyes.

'I think we will take tea during the second interval,' said Kisliakof.

'I don't want any tea now,' answered Tamara abruptly, fully occupied looking to the right and left among the crowd.

'Yes, it is early yet . . . better during the second interval,' agreed Kisliakof.

He ought to have been talking gaily, so that those who passed would have turned round and smiled at his wit, but he was depressed all the time by various thoughts. When they passed the buffet it seemed to him that Tamara glanced at the open chocolate boxes. She probably looked at them and thought: 'He offers tea, but not chocolates, in spite of all his money.'

For this reason each time they passed the buffet Kisliakof found an excuse to point out some painting on the wall or some interesting face in the opposite direction.

'My God, how I would like to get fixed up somewhere!' said Tamara mournfully; she was still looking about as though seeking someone. 'I am so tired of this dull monotony.'

Kisliakof was offended by these words.

'I thought that you got something from your meeting with me,' he said complainingly.

'Ah, yes. I am not talking about that. I am saying that I am depressed by my dependency, when I have to ask my husband for every rouble.'

At this he ought to have said:

'What nonsense. Let me give you some money! How much do you want?'

But he was obliged to remain silent.

When they re-entered the auditorium Tamara started to look for someone in the stalls.

'Is it possible they did not come?' asked she.

'Who?'

'The women friends who promised to introduce me to the cinema producer.'

As soon as the second act was over Kisliakof said hurriedly:

'Now let us go and have some tea.'

It seemed as if he had been thinking of this all the time during the performance. They went, but the moment they entered the foyer a slim girl ran towards Tamara and embraced her.

'Here you are! I have looked for you until I was quite wearied,' said Tamara with pleasure, in a gay and lively tone, which was quite unlike that with which she had been conversing with her companion. Then two other girls, with short skirts and long silk stockings, and hair cropped in the new fashion with pomaded curls near the temples, joined them. They were accompanied by

two young men of the gigolo type, with thin waists and fashionable suits.

They all stood together, blocking the way of the passers-by, until at last Tamara said:

'Let us go and have some tea.'

Kisliakof felt his hair stand on end when she uttered these words. What was going to happen when all this crowd was seated at the table? There would already have been a disgrace and scandal if there proved to be less money in his pocket than he thought there was.

'No, I have some secrets for Tamara,' said the slim girl who had approached them first, and the two others went away with their young men.

Kisliakof breathed again. Approaching the waitress who served the tea, with hands still trembling after the fright which he had experienced, he asked for two glasses.

'And what about yourself?' asked Tamara with astonishment.

'I don't feel as though I want any,' and he pushed a dish of pastries towards them.

The slim girl bit into one and, making a wry face, put it back on the plate. Kisliakof felt that he ought to offer her another, but he was terrified lest this person with her fine taste would try them all, in which case he would be lost.

But the girl said:

'It is never any use eating pastries here; they are always stale.'

These words made Kisliakof feel grateful for her refined taste. He took courage and even livened up somewhat.

'Is this your husband?' asked the slim girl, in a low voice, with an air of lively interest.

'Something of the sort,' answered Tamara with the same animation, and Kisliakof felt that she was exhibiting him in the same way as a woman exhibits a new purchase when meeting a woman friend.

'There he is!' said the girl suddenly.

She jumped up and approached a tall, broadly built man, with fair eyelashes and carefully brushed fair hair.

He was standing at the end of the foyer like a man who comes in at the end of the performance and, with striking lack of ceremony, looks into the faces of the women who are walking about there. From time to time a scarcely noticeable smile appeared on his face when he looked at a passing woman. It seemed that it did not enter his head that someone might feel displeased with his attentions.

This was the cinema producer, Miller, who spoke Russian with a strong foreign accent.

Tamara's friend ran towards him and, whispering something, dragged him over to the table at which Tamara and Kisliakof were sitting.

He went as if unwillingly, with a lazy step, at the same time scrutinizing Tamara. She appeared to please him, for his face lit up with a smile. He became attentive and respectful when he kissed Tamara's hand—Kisliakof he entirely ignored.

And Tamara, forgetting her companion, felt shy with this important, self-assured man, who was, in addition, a foreigner.

'I hope that you will give me permission to put you through a film test,' said Miller in broken Russian. 'You have a face and appearance which interest me. Yes, I think they would interest anyone,' he added with a guarded smile.

Tamara blushed like a girl when one so important paid her a compliment.

Kisliakof felt annoyed that his companion should be examined like a horse in front of him; he was not even asked whether it pleased him, but was completely ignored. And she was pleased. . . . He ought to have taken her by the arm and led her away from this bold fellow, saying to him:

'There is no necessity for my wife to earn money!'

Then he should have put her in a smart cab and taken her home.

But the trouble was that he had not enough money for a tram, let alone a cab, so he did not lead Tamara out or say anything. He stood aside, looking at a picture on the wall, and making it appear that he felt in no way bored. He even made his fist into a spyglass, through which to look at the picture.

He did not notice that everyone had returned to the auditorium until Tamara tugged at his sleeve and said: 'Let us go.'

At the end of the performance Miller overtook them near the mirror at the foot of the staircase. He was wearing a loosely-fitting overcoat, a smart hat and grey chamois gloves. With assurance and impudence, as it seemed to Kisliakof, he took Tamara's arm, and they all three walked along the pavement. As the pavement narrowed Kisliakof had to walk behind. She did not glance round at him, as she was completely engrossed in her companion. Kisliakof felt disgusted by the excited shrillness of her tone; she was like a girl talking to a teacher of whom she is shy and whom she is trying her best to please. He ought to have caught up to this fellow and, tapping him on the back, said:

'Now that's enough . . . you have had your talk. Off with you. Now go home and get to sleep.'

He slackened his pace, so that Tamara would have to look round for him, but she did not look round. Then he crossed to the other

side of the street and, stopping, he watched Miller hire a smart car and take Tamara home.

In Kisliakof's pockets were nine coppers—one too little for the tiam fare, and he had to walk.

XLIV

AS HE WALKED HOME HE WAS THINKING THAT ONE OF THE USUAL scenes would begin. The theme would be that on the first evening of his wife's return he had quarrelled with her and had stayed out until late at night, which meant that there was no love between them, no spiritual link whatever.

If that was so then their life together had no meaning. This was Elena Victorovna's usual closing remark, and every time he had to control himself so that they should not be quarrelling the whole night long. He would say that he could not live without her, that she was his moral support and that his shattered nerves and sclerosis were to blame for the quarrel.

But really, if the situation was examined, what did their living together mean? Was it family life? There was no family at all unless one counted the dogs.

What united them? Continuation of the race? But their whole lives had held no greater fear than that a child would appear on the scene. She simply lived with him (and there was no escaping from her). She, a stout and uninteresting woman, lived with him because he dare not tell her to her face what he thought about her when he was in an angry mood. He could have lived with any casually met woman in the way in which he lived with her now, and such a woman would certainly not have been so stout and short. And, irony of fate, it was she who thought that she represented the whole meaning of life for him (although it was he himself who was often obliged to say such things).

It was true that there had been a time when she was his only friend, the dearest person in the world, but that was all long ago, so long ago that it was nearly forgotten.

Kisliakof approached the house with a fixed determination to agree with Elena Victorovna when she said that there was no sense in their cohabitation. He was even pleased that he had not enough money for the tram fare, as this would make him half an hour later—the stronger would be her attack and the sooner the denouement.

But, contrary to his expectation, Elena Victorovna met him meekly; with not a single word did she hint at his disappearance and late return, and she even said:

'Are you hungry? I kept something warm for you.'

Kisliakof was put out of countenance and he became ashamed, but he did not want to let the anger against his wife, which he had nursed with such difficulty, cool down. The thought that

Elena Victorovna was afraid to be left without means and that for this reason was so meek, also came to him.

The more attentive and tender she was towards him, the more it seemed to him that she was like this because of his money.

Kisliakof ate with eyes lowered on his plate in order not to meet the glances of his wife, and he only answered her questions in monosyllables:

‘Yes. . . . No. . . .’

Elena Victorovna at last sighed and became silent. The bulldog, with its hateful flat jaw and hanging lip, which had been sleeping in the arm-chair, approached and watched him eat his cutlet. At every movement of his master he wagged his short tail.

Kisliakof, as was usual on such occasions, paid no attention to the bulldog and only thought with hatred that this beast did not consider him as master, yet sought to ingratiate itself when he was seated at the table.

The next day Elena Victorovna was just as quiet and meek, and seeing a speck of chalk on her husband’s sleeve, even took a brush and carefully removed it. Trying hard to suppress a good feeling towards his wife, Kisliakof continued to maintain his aloofness. Silently he returned home, silently ate the dinner which had been saved for him, silently sat down to read after dinner. He even took a cushion and lay on the couch, which he would never have dared to do before; and in the same way he left the house, noticing at the same time that his wife watched him with perturbation.

The aunt was moving about on tiptoe now and had even ceased to speak in whispers to the dogs. She now silently admonished them.

ON THE THIRD DAY HE WAS LATE IN RETURNING FOR DINNER. ELENA Victorovna placed the plate of soup before him and, sitting opposite, said:

'Will you please explain what is the matter? . . . On the very first day of my return you went out and did not come back until one o'clock in the morning. I did not say a word. I was, and still am, meek and attentive and afraid to disturb your peace. In fact, for several days I have had to go about like a criminal.'

The aunt, as usual during their quarrels, immediately tiptoed behind the screen. She tried to be silent, but could not restrain a sneeze.

'We all seem to be living in terror, afraid to breathe in case we disturb you' (in spite of his irritation Kisliakof was pleased that they were afraid to breathe), 'and in return,' continued Elena Victorovna, 'all I receive is stony silence.'

Her neck and bosom were already covered with red patches and even her ears went red.

'Let us come to an understanding of what my crime consists,' ended Elena Victorovna. Kisliakof went on eating his soup and staring stubbornly at his plate in silence.

But he felt aggrieved by her words: 'did not say a word,' and thought that by saying that she had not said a word about his not returning until one o'clock she inferred that he was her slave, even one deliberate absence from home was such a crime that she had to control herself in order not to speak about it.

'I am tired of your everlasting guardianship,' said he angrily. 'Can't anybody stay out until one, or even two or three o'clock without someone getting it into their head that he has disappeared?'

'Yes, but probably they do not go out until one o'clock the first day their wives return.'

As usual, Elena Victorovna distinguished herself with extraordinary logic, and Kisliakof, who was preparing a whole flow of angry but just words about the enslavement of one individual by another, hesitated after her first retort and did not know what to say.

Having in his heart and in his head a dark wave of anger against his wife, a feeling of disadvantage before her logic and at the same time a wish to offend her in the most painful way, he said:

'I went out on the first day of my wife's return because it is

impossible to work under the conditions in which I live, when the room is full of all sorts of aunts and dogs!'

Uttering this and jumping excitedly from his seat, he began to pace the room. His hands trembled and he continuously stroked his short hair with one palm.

Elena Victorovna looked at him and said quietly and firmly:

'There you lie. You were without me for ten days and had such a great opportunity to rest and work that you would not have lost anything by letting the day of my return pass. Such conditions are not yours alone, it is the same with everybody, and it is simply dishonest and indecent to blame me for this. You should not be the one to say this to me, for I have regarded your work above everything else, because of it I have changed myself into a cook and washer-up. I myself have washed your linen and darned your socks. But you see it is a long time since you worked. . . .'

Kisliakof was mentally answering each point. Concerning the socks, he could have said that if she was not there he would have been able to buy new ones and in that case there would have been no need to wear those which had been darned.

'There is one thing I do know, and that is that in our life together I have lost all incentive to work,' said he, knowing that nothing could cause his wife more pain and offence than this sentence.

This unexpected humiliation caused a tuft of hair to become loose at the back of Elena Victorovna's head. She did not notice it and it shook about at her every movement.

'Ah, is that so?' said she quietly. 'It means in simple words, that you order me out? Is that so?'

Kisliakof continued to pace the room angrily. He did not answer. Then he seated himself at the writing desk, with his back to his wife. He was pleased that she herself had put the dot on the 'i', it would have been uncomfortable for him, as a man of the educated class, to tell her to clear out.

It was now enough for him to remain silent, to bite his lip and for once in his life to have the strength to see a humiliating and undignified position out to the bitter end.

In reality he did bite his lip and was silent, but he was nervously and excitedly twisting the hair over his forehead between his fingers.

He expected that his wife on not getting an answer would say:

'In that case I will take my aunt and the dogs and go. I am not like other women and will keep my word: no reproaches whatever, no material or moral claims will I advance; once the spiritual link with a man is broken, I want nothing from him.'

But, contrary to his expectations, Elena Victorovna said something quite different.

'So that's your idea is it?'

As a rustling could be heard in Pechonkinas' room behind the partition, she repeated it in a lower voice, almost in a whisper:

'So that's what you are aiming at? In that case, my friend, I will put the question in a different way!' The tuft of hair was trembling more and more, and in spite of the tenseness of the moment it distracted Kisliakof's attention.

'Then we will approach this question in a businesslike way. This room belongs to me! I was not so stupid. I had the foresight to have all the receipts for rent made out in my name. I paid the money in!'

The unexpectedness of the blow caused a few hairs to stick out over Kisliakof's forehead. It made him dumb-founded, and he did not know what to say. Really, a woman who so recently was putting spiritual life higher than anything else in the world, who was prepared to make any sacrifice, as it appeared, had planned at the same time that it was better to pay the rent in her own name . . . and was now throwing him out of the room along with the spiritual life.

'But the money was mine!'

'And perhaps mine . . .' answered Elena Victorovna, lolling in the arm-chair in a provocative way. She even put her fat, fleshy arms akimbo, like a fish wife.

Kisliakof was amazed that a woman with higher education could show the signs of a vulgar woman at the first moral set back.

He was terrified.

'And on this footing,' continued Elena Victorovna, 'I speak quite definitely. Get out of my room! Take your books and papers and clear out!' She suddenly got up from the arm-chair and began to throw the books and papers on the floor.

Everything went black before Kisliakof's eyes. Like a tiger he sprang to the table and grasped his wife by the arm, but immediately the bulldog rushed to Elena Victorovna's assistance and seized him by the boot. He kicked it off and began to drag his wife away from the table, at the same time feeling such hatred towards her that he wanted to twist and break her arm.

Unable to control herself, she was beating him off and stretching towards the table to upset the pile of books balanced on the edge. As Kisliakof, with his foot pressed against the table, was dragging her back, she, trying to beat him off, banged her elbow on the bridge of his nose. His pince-nez fell and broke into innumerable pieces; he saw a shower of sparks before his eyes. At the same time he heard his books scatter in the direction of the door. With all his strength he gave Elena Victorovna a push in the back. She uttered a shriek and fell on the couch, with her chest on the bolster and her head in the cushion.

The aunt jumped out from behind the screen. She was pale with fright.

'Leave us alone, Aunt!' said Elena Victorovna quietly, as she re-arranged her hair. The protruding tuft still remained.

The aunt disappeared. The bulldog, with head on one side, looked questioningly at them.

'You struck me,' said Elena Victorovna, in a low but angry voice.

'No. It was you who struck me,' answered Kisliakof, pressing a handkerchief to his nose as if the blood was flowing like a fountain.

'You struck me!' repeated Elena Victorovna, expressing no pity or concern whatever about his injured nose. 'I will not live with you for another moment.'

'Excellent,' thought Kisliakof, keeping the handkerchief to his nose and turning it over as though still bleeding profusely.

'Go where you like, look for a room for yourself, but I will not stay in the same place with you for another moment.'

'It is you who can clear out,' said he.

'Ah, you blackguard, you blackguard,' repeated Elena Victorovna, as if unable to believe what she heard. She collapsed on the couch and began to sob. First they were only convulsive, silent sobs, then she began to choke and throw herself about the couch, from one bolster to the other, pressing her handkerchief to her mouth and biting it with her teeth, as if to show that she was about to expire.

Kisliakof went over to the washstand, and, damping his handkerchief, pressed it to his nose, as if wishing to show his wife by this that he was in a better position than she to present himself as the aggrieved person.

Whilst she was choking, gasping for air, with her arms thrown limply on the couch and her face covered with tears, Kisliakof paced the room, saying to himself:

'Excellent. In any case everything is clear now. There can be a divorce.'

The first thing which entered his head was that he would now be able to throw the bulldog out.

Nothing comes at once. In the old days he could not have thought without a shudder that some vulgar misunderstanding about money could come between him and Elena Victorovna. He would even have been afraid to hint that she was living on his money and also restraining his liberty. He had now unexpectedly stepped over this line without any effort, and even with enthusiasm, after the first fierce tussle.

He stood before Elena Victorovna with a feeling of cruelty

which even surprised himself, looking at her as if he expected some further performance.

Suddenly her lips, bitten and swollen, moved, and remaining half-opened, uttered indistinctly:

‘Go away . . . go away, if only for a time . . . I implore. . . .’

‘With the greatest pleasure,’ said Kisiakof.

He took his cap and pushed open the door which led into the corridor with violence. The aunt, who had been peeping through the keyhole, jumped back, with her two hands pressed to her forehead. The children of the Budenny Detachment were standing along the opposite wall and the tenants of the other rooms were all peering from their doors.

IT HAD HAPPENED DURING QUARRELS WITH HIS WIFE, IN THE MOST excessive cases, when the talk had turned to divorce or suicide, that Kisliakof would leave the house, banging the door and not returning until late at night. If he had anywhere to stay for the night he did so and returned the next morning.

By that time Elena Victorovna was becoming alarmed; she was beginning to think that he had, perhaps, thrown himself from some sixth floor window, or under a tram, and that soon his mangled body would be brought home.

She would rush to all her friends, and in her terror would even hurry to the river, and when, having reached the last stage of anguish and blaming herself wholeheartedly for her lack of control, she found him, she could only shed tears of joy at seeing him alive and well.

Kisliakof would sometimes tell her that he really had almost committed suicide because this quarrel had struck him with the lack of higher standards in their relationships, and by mentioning suicide he wanted to show her how painful for him was this discord and the loss of her love.

Actually he never was near to suicide, but sometimes he would say aloud, as he walked away from the house in some unknown direction:

'Now, I will throw myself from the sixth floor; she will come to her senses when it is too late.'

Then would begin self pity, followed by pity for his wife in her despair and loneliness after his death. At such a stage he would return home and tell his wife about the suicide which he had contemplated, so that in future she should avoid such performances, to strengthen her pity for him and to complete their reconciliation.

'Stupid thing! . . .' Elena Victorovna would then exclaim, frightened and at the same time happy in the strength of his affection for her. 'Now, how is it possible to go on like this? . . .'

This evening it was raining outside: it was too wet to go in an unknown direction. In order not to get drenched, Kisliakof stood in the porch of the adjoining house and decided to remain there until Elena Victorovna had reached the necessary point of anxiety and fear. But the strong wind began to blow the rain into the porch and the rain got under his collar. Not knowing where to go, he decided to return to his room. This was obviously premature, the more so because he was still consumed with anger

against his wife, and a feeling of pity for her had not yet appeared. On the contrary his anger was still stronger because the rain was dripping down his back, owing to his standing under the porch. He went home, seated himself at the writing desk and buried his nose in his papers.

Elena Victorovna, her eyes red with weeping, came out from behind the screen and said:

‘Will this go on for ever? . . .’

‘What is it all about?’ asked Kisliakof quietly, and he was pleased with the restraint and indifference of his tone.

‘How do you mean, what is it all about? My God, what has happened to you? . . . Can’t you see I am worried to death? . . . You do not look at me, treat me like a dog! What have I done wrong?’

Her voice trembled and Kisliakof felt a tickling sensation in his nose, caused by an inexpressible and unexpected pity for his wife.

He felt that he wanted to approach his wife, to embrace her and say: ‘You have not done anything wrong, it is simply my soul which is perishing still further. It started from the time when I changed my life to something counterfeit; everything that was in me ceased to exist. From that moment I lost all sense of the highest human values. Everything came to mean the same thing for me; what meaning have all these values to me when my own value disappeared long ago? My downfall has reached such a stage that I am thinking of the money you cost me, and whether I can get rid of you, so that I can spend it on myself. I have lost all sensibility of that which cannot be bought for money: the true and disinterested love of a dear one. Save me, I am lost. . . .’

But he did not embrace her or say this. He lacked the courage to say such things about himself to a dear one, even at a suitable moment.

He only caressed his wife’s hand and said in a tone of reconciliation:

‘Now, that’s enough. . . .’

He expected that with an overflow of joy at the impending reconciliation she would embrace him. But Elena Victorovna did not embrace him. She, who had to bear so much, wanted first of all to show him how wrong he was, how senselessly cruel towards her, and this wrecked everything.

‘Do you remember my feelings when I came back? It was unbearable to be without you. I could not think about my own health while I was imagining that some misfortune had befallen you here.’ Standing in the middle of the room, she began to talk, pointing out her disinterested love for him, and his indifference.

Kisliakof was hurt by this.

'Now I am the *first* to turn towards you with a kind word and you . . .'

'And when did you turn towards me with this kind word? When I am quite worn out?' said Elena Victorovna.

'Yes, but all the same I turned, and you . . .'

With half-closed eyes Elena Victorovna looked angrily at her husband for some time, then said:

'And you think that you can behave like a brute towards me just when you please, be silent for whole days, and when it pleases you, to have the kindness to graciously forgive me—when you are really to blame! . . .' She even pointed an accusing finger at him. . . . 'Then I must immediately get on my hind legs and smile lovingly!' said Elena Victorovna, stooping down and making grimaces with her hands and face.

It flashed across Kisliakof's mind that she was so rude because she was paying the rent in her own name. Losing control, he shouted at the top of his voice:

'You are to blame in the first place, because you are living with me and I cannot get rid of you or your aunt and the dogs!'

He then saw that something terrible and irreparable had happened. Elena Victorovna, with her hands lifted above her head as though protecting herself from a blow, turned pale, and looked at her husband with eyes dilated with terror. He saw by her appearance that it would be impossible to repair what he had said or to pass it off as a joke. Such a sentence could not be explained or excused by any state of excitement or irritation.

Seeing that in any case it was all over, he began to shriek:

'Yes. I am sick to death of living with you in one room. I am sick and tired of your everlasting guardianship! I do not intend to be for ever working just to keep you and to provide you with pleasures. I want to live for myself, and perhaps it will suit me better to give pleasure to someone other than you. . . .'

He saw that Elena Victorovna became still more pale on hearing these words, but he could not stop once he had started these terrible utterances. The more defenceless he felt before her really self-denying love for him, the stronger was he seized by a new lustfulness of anger.

'Ah, is that so?' said Elena Victorovna in a low, scarcely audible voice. 'I am not wanted? It would suit you better to give pleasure to someone other than me? . . . Perhaps the chief cause of everything lies in this—'

'Think what you like,' said Kisliakof, and he left the room.

Thenceforward events occurred with astonishing rapidity.

XLVII

KISLIAKOF WAS THUNDERSTRUCK WHEN HE RETURNED FROM WORK the next day.

His room had the appearance of a hospital ward: beds stood near each of the four walls. His own narrow camp bed had been brought out, and probably in order that his humiliation should be the greater, it had been placed against the wall where the door was.

It proved that Elena Victorovna was accommodating her niece, who had come from the provinces. Her bed was placed where Kisiakof's had stood, near the writing desk. The niece—a lively girl of about sixteen—had probably been told that she need not be on too much ceremony with her uncle, as he was a blackguard and was the master in the room no longer. The dog's mats had been placed in corners—that of the bulldog just near his bed.

Kisiakof realized the position after his first glance. He saw first of all that this was the start of open warfare and that his hands were free to take the most open and violent action.

The traditions of a man of the educated class, which hitherto had confused him, now disappeared.

The first thing he did was to kick the bulldog's mat across the room, to the unbounded satisfaction of the dogs, who, misunderstanding the position, imagined that their master had returned in a good temper and wanted to play with them. But the next moment they knew what the game was: when they themselves received kicks and disappeared in panic underneath the couch.

Kisiakof immediately changed the place of his bed with that of the niece. All this was done in silence; meanwhile, Elena Victorovna stood in the middle of the room biting her lips in impotent fury, her face splotched red with anger.

Kisiakof decided that there was now a competition as to whose nerves were the stronger, and he told himself that all limits had been passed!

So he now took his dinner at the communal dining-room and not at home, and when he returned to the room would seat himself in silence at the writing desk, or lie on his bed. He did not worry about lying down when he wished and deliberately lay with his boots on the bedcover, which was one of the things which Elena Victorovna could not stand.

If previously he had been careful, walking about on tiptoes when someone was sleeping or having a serious talk, now he did everything with noise and clatter. If he had to open the sideboard he purposely banged the door; if he returned home late, when

everyone was sleeping, he deliberately put the light full on, making even the dogs blink on their mats.

When tea was served he seated himself at his writing desk and made it appear that he was reading, though really he could not concentrate to read a single sentence, as he was listening all the time to what was going on behind his back. He was thinking with what hate his wife was probably looking at the back of his head and was thinking out a venomous answer in case he spoke to her. He pitied himself sometimes when he thought that not long ago his wife was caring for him, had always noticed the slightest change in his humour, and with anxious care had asked what was wrong with him: was something disagreeable happening? would he not have something to eat? Now she treated him worse than a dog; she would not give him anything to eat, even if he was starving.

Once his watch went wrong and he decided to take the gold one. It was always in the top right-hand drawer of the dresser, where his things were kept, but when he opened the drawer he found nothing there. As he stood over the drawer reflecting on the depths to which they had fallen, Elena Victorovna entered.

‘Where is my watch?’

‘The watch is mine, not yours.’

He could find no answer, but felt that he was quite freed now from any restraining influences. Now it was war.

Elena Victorovna now began to dress with more care; if she was going out she stood before the mirror for a long time, painting her lips and powdering her nose. Kisliakof watched her, hating her with all the power of his heart, because she imagined that she could attract someone. But he experienced a feeling of jealousy at the thought that she was beautifying herself for others and not for him. Had she not often said that other men did not exist so far as she was concerned?

At home she went about with a dressing-gown which flapped open, and with uncombed hair, in spite of the fact that he was now a stranger to her.

But the worst was yet to come. One day, on returning home, he found that the room had been divided into two parts by a curtain made up of two sheets, so that when he sat at his writing desk he might have been sitting in a laundry.

The dining table, in Elena Victorovna’s section, was opened out to its full extent, and on it were lying patterns and pieces of dress material. Behind the curtain there was the tittering of women. Perhaps Elena Victorovna had decided to use her talents to advantage.

Kisliakof saw that life threatened to become impossible. He sat in his partitioned corner and the voice of his wife grated on

his ears. She was fitting on, talking and laughing in an unnatural tone, ingratiating herself as people do with customers.

It seemed to him that this loud ingratiating laugh was directed against him; she probably wanted to show that she had found a way out and could do without her husband. Kisliakof suddenly felt himself to be an unwanted guest, whom one is not afraid to disturb with a loud laugh, but tries by every other means to be rid of.

A policy by which he was totally ignored was introduced; they passed him with heavy steps, talking loudly if he was resting after dinner. Even the aunt talked to the dogs, not in a whisper, but loudly.

Elena Victorovna not only ceased to offer him tea, but locked up the sideboard when the crockery had been put back there after each meal. Her voice now always resounded in the corridor or in the kitchen, and if she was at loggerheads with the tenants she would return to the room in a fury, like a tigress, and as vulgar as a washerwoman, in her old dressing-gown with greasy sleeves. The dressing-gown did not fasten and she grasped it with her hand over her stout chest, and when she was doing something she held it with her elbow so that it should not fall open.

It was disturbing to look at this woman. She became grasping, miserly, insincere and heartless, and when necessary from material calculations, disgustingly flattering and ingratiating. She developed an extraordinary power of standing up for her rights. At the time when he, after the explosion, had already started to give way, she went still further with the fight. She felt and showed such hatred towards a being whom she had previously loved that it frightened him to see what strong hatred could exist in a woman. Once, on approaching his writing desk, he saw an official paper leaning against the inkstand. He felt his blood run cold as he glanced through it. It was the tribunal's order for his divorce from Elena Victorovna. She had done this without even informing him. Then he was called to the house manager's office and informed that his divorced wife had petitioned for his expulsion from the room, as he had paid no rent for three months and she had no intention to pay it for him, and that the occupation of space by him prevented her from earning her own living.

The various inquiries and evidence which he had to get kept him running about the whole day. Elena Victorovna also had to visit certain establishments, and returned exhausted and angry, screaming at the dogs who rushed for her embrace. Later, they both—she at the dining table and he at his desk—read through the documents which they had prepared against each other.

At the same time the territory occupied by Kisliakof became smaller and smaller, and one by one things began to disappear.

The bronze candlesticks which he had bought disappeared from the table and appeared on her dresser. He did not say a word. Then in the same way the shelf with the porcelain changed places. He was so horrified that a human being could fall to such depths that he gripped his head between his hands. If one could only think that this woman had received a superior education, had been brought up in the best traditions of the Russian intelligentsia. Was it possible that it was only superficial, a veneer which could be rubbed off with the first friction? She probably suffered no pangs in doing such things which were humiliating to a cultured person.

Why then was he affected differently? He was terrified by such a downfall: she was robbing him of everything, only an arm-chair remained near the writing desk; but he did not say anything to her. It meant that there were varying degrees of decency even in people of the same social status. But a few minutes later he surprised Elena Victorovna in the act of replacing his mahogany arm-chair by an ordinary cane chair.

The blood rushed to his head, and without realizing what he did, he threw himself on his wife and began to pull the arm-chair out of her grasp. She gripped it so strongly that it was impossible to tear it away. He began to tear her hands away, but they again caught hold of the arm-chair and held it. All this was done without a word being spoken, and all that could be heard was their heavy breathing.

For one moment he was so disgusted that he wanted to close his eyes and run away from here, from the wife, from himself, but just then his wife bit his hand so painfully that with renewed anger he tore the arm-chair out of her grasp and pushed her so forcibly in the chest that she fell on the dog's mat.

When customers called to try on their dresses and undressed behind the curtain, he deliberately got up from the desk and began to pace the room. From behind the curtain he would immediately hear their frightened shrieks as they seized the tablecloth from the table in order to cover themselves up.

At one such moment a committee from the town house management entered to verify the conditions under which they were living according to the statement of Elena Victorovna. The committee confirmed the abnormality of the position.

One of the members addressed Kisliakof:

'You would do better, Comrade Kisliakof, to sit still in your little corner while your wife's customers are being fitted.'

'What! Must I sit there the whole day long?'

'Then go away from here.'

'Where? Find me a place.'

'That we cannot do.'

'And what can I do? If this citizeness finds it uncomfortable here, let her move.'

All the tenants of the flat collected in a crowd at the open door, as happens when a corpse is being removed. If some stranger asked what was the matter he was told:

'Rowing. They are divorced and cannot find separate rooms.'

Kisliakof was certainly not only guided by obstinacy. This really was a question of finding a shelter if he or she found themselves in the street, and once the fight, and a fierce fight, was being waged between them, there was no need to think about noble actions.

At last the problem was decided. In the house manager's office he was told that Room No. 9 was vacant, but it was added that a woman was coming with an order from the Central Committee, and that they would have to give her the room, in spite of the fact that justice demanded that the requirements of the tenants of the house should first of all be satisfied. Officially, they could not do this, but if he wished to try to get the room he must act more boldly. If he occupied the room first it would be difficult to dislodge him and it would be easier to keep this woman with the order out, though this was not quite certain; it all depended on her insistence.

'The moment we open the room, get your belongings in. She is now on her way here.'

Taking three steps at a time Kisliakof rushed upstairs, seized his case from under the bed and began to pack. There was such haste in his face and movements that one might have thought he was escaping from a burning building.

Going out into the corridor he saw a strange woman walking down, carrying a hatbox and looking at every door.

Bumping into the carter, who was entering the corridor, Kisliakof rushed to the door of the vacant room. Realizing at once what was happening, the lady also rushed there, but arrived too late. Kisliakof had had time to throw his case into the room, and, diving under the lady's arm sat down on the case, breathless and bathed in perspiration.

When the lady tried to put her hatbox inside, with a deft movement he kicked it out and locked the door.

'I will go to the court,' screamed the lady outside the door. 'It is absolute violence.'

'Didn't I tell you not to be late?' said the manager, who had entered upon the scene.

'These are not people but brigands!' she continued to shriek. 'I shall immediately go to the court.'

'The proper thing to do,' said the manager of the house. 'They are better able to judge. What can we do if he was first to

occupy it? . . . And in the first place we have to satisfy our own tenants.'

Still sitting on the case, Kisliakof listened to the shrieks of the angry woman, and, taking off his pince-nez, wiped his forehead and damp hair, which was sticking out like feathers in all directions. Then he got up, and after standing some time in dazed terror, with his head pressed in both hands, went out.

XLVIII

Tired and exhausted after the fighting of the past few days, Kisiakof walked down the street without knowing where he was going. He had no wish to call on Arkady, as he had decided to wait for some time in order that Tamara might become alarmed by his absence. He went along the boulevard, passing the Smolensky market, where people of the old regime were selling second-hand things—remnants of tea services, yellowish lace and worn sabres.

These were mainly elderly aristocratic ladies, with dirty hands and unwashed faces. It was the so-called 'Nobles' Row'.

Kisiakof involuntarily crossed to the other side for fear that he might meet some acquaintance whom he could not pass without stopping and expressing sympathy. (Fine acquaintances if someone like Polukhin should chance to see him.)

Then he went to the Alexander station and took a ticket on one of the local trains.

He got out at the first stop.

It was the middle of September. The fragrant breath of autumn was already in the air. Everywhere could be seen the yellow clusters of birch trees, with their leaves falling sleepily to the ground. The muddy roads of autumn showed darkly in the midst of harvested fields, and red threads of mountain ash appeared over the hedgerows.

From the long rows in the peasants' enclosures, with sacks dotted here and there, came the strong smell of potato leaves, nipped by the morning frosts; the damp autumn grass which covered the yellow leaves was wild and coarse.

Here was the smell of earth and autumn: after the hurry and bustle of town it seemed to breathe a special comfort and quietness.

To Kisiakof it seemed strange that there could be such a quietness; he had forgotten that it existed.

He looked at the sky. It had the calm, even appearance of quiet autumn days. High above he could see the faint line of storks flying to the south and could hear the almost inaudible flapping of their wings. It seemed to Kisiakof that he had lost contact with this continuous movement of life.

Life did not stop, it went on for ever. Last year this railway was not here, neither these two factories with their tall chimneys, nor that new row of houses.

It suddenly seemed to him that if only one could combine with this moving and creative life, even in his present work with Polukhin, unhurried and insensual, then all would be well: if he could

remember that he was a *human being*, that his essence appeared on this earth perhaps only once in millions of years, he would realize that it was no use, tearing a room from a woman who had an order from the Central Committee.

An old man passing, with a sack on his shoulder and a pipe in his mouth, stopped and asked for a light.

'How quiet it is in this place where you live, old man,' said Kisliakof.

'And you, do you come from the town, or are you staying here in the village?'

'No. I just came here for an hour.'

'You felt that you needed a little change?'

The old man went on and Kisliakof stood for a long time on a hillock.

Then, in an enlightened mood, he slowly turned towards home.

As he was passing through the square, after leaving the station, he unexpectedly saw Polukhin, who was waiting near the tram stop.

Without knowing why, he hurried over to him and, shouting more loudly more than was necessary, hailed him. Polukhin glancing up with astonishment saw him and approached.

On meeting Polukhin in the street, Kisliakof experienced greater joy than when he saw him in the museum. It was as if everyone, seeing how friendly they were, could not help but be envious.

'Where are you going?' asked Kisliakof.

'I want to go to the stadium, but you see what a crowd there is, it is impossible to get a seat.' He pointed to an overcrowded tramcar.

Polukhin's living eye appeared affable and friendly; the glass one, fixed and suspicious.

'And what is on at the stadium to-day?' asked Kisliakof, trying to avoid the false eye's vacant stare.

'Our fellows are playing against the Austrians.'

'Let us walk over then; it is not far.'

They went.

As they neared the stadium, Kisliakof took Polukhin's arm so that he should not lose him in the crowd which was pressing into the entrance. He felt still greater friendship and love for Polukhin now, because he could take him by the arm.

Kisliakof had no ticket, but Polukhin was a prominent member of the committee in charge of the stadium.

'He is with me,' said he to the collector.

Entering the yard of the stadium and looking back on the crowd which was pressing into the entrance, Kisliakof felt greatly superior, even to those who had tickets.

He waited at the ticket office while Polukhin did everything that was necessary. This gave him a sense of his close contact with the proletariat. He did not thank Polukhin effusively as his chief who was overwhelming him with kindness, but asked simply and quietly:

'Well, did you get them? Can we go in now?'

He spoke quietly, but at the same time experienced some inner tremor because of this extraordinary feeling of friendship and because he could accept Polukhin's attentions so simply, as though they were an everyday occurrence.

After exchanging greetings with some Party people, probably people of importance, Polukhin, pointing to Kisliakof, said:

'May I introduce you?'

They kept stopping in a large group near the barrier, talking and laughing, and Kisliakof, not being conversant with the topic of conversation and not being able to enter into it, moved nearer to the barrier and pretended to be examining the stadium, so that they should not regard him as an outsider.

The enormous stadium looked like an oval amphitheatre: it was filled with rows of seats, gaily coloured by the crowds of people, flags, white-lettered red banners and bunting. One could see caps of all sorts, hats and kerchiefs. Down the gangways flowed continuous streams of fresh arrivals into the rows of seats. The attention of everyone was centred on the green oval of turf on which the contest was to take place. At that moment some preliminary games were just finishing.

All those who entered, on seeing the figures in blue shirts and red shorts running about, were inquiring:

'What, have they started?'

'Not yet, these are the second preliminary matches,' someone would answer.

Although the inquirer did not understand what the 'second preliminary matches' were, he was content with the answer, and moved along the row, looking for his seat.

'Do you see how immense it is?' said Polukhin, when they were seated together. 'They say that in size it is the greatest stadium in Europe.'

'Yes,' said Kisliakof, looking round the stadium through his pince-nez. 'We had not such things before the revolution. You have here the real propaganda of Communism.'

'But when is it going to start?' people were asking impatiently.

'These must finish first.'

'What do we want with them? Let them go and finish somewhere else. We want the Austrians.'

'The Austrians will be here as well.'

Some man in a peaked cap was particularly impatient. He kept jumping up from his seat, expressing his annoyance at the delay, then sitting down again and impatiently pushing his hat to the back of his head.

At last a shiver of excitement ran through the whole mass of people who were seated along the rows.

Someone shouted:

'Here they come!'

Everyone began to peer forward, wondering from which direction the contestants, and chiefly the foreign side, would come.

'Where are they? Where?'

'Can't you see . . . coming out of the tunnel.'

Photographers appeared.

'No. Those are the photographers.'

Suddenly the whole structure shook with applause: from the tunnel jumped a small figure in red, then another in blue football kit, the others followed them and spread out lightly over the green lawn.

The reds intermingled with the blues.

'Which are ours? The red ones?' Could be heard hurried questions.

'No. Ours are the blue ones.'

'Is that so?'

The spectators looked at each other, pleased that their side, as if showing hospitality to the visitors, had allowed them to use their colours.

The band started to play with a flourish. The red and blue figures, which seemed from so far away as tiny as toys, took up their positions in a circle in the centre, the blues opposite the reds, and one figure in blue presented the opposing side with a huge bouquet of flowers. This was the signal for a tremendous round of applause from the spectators, of whom there were about forty thousand.

Kisliakof experienced a feeling of elation hitherto unknown to him. It was produced by this enormous building, filled with its large crowd, the predominant number of whom were of the proletariat. And he—Hyppolit Kisliakof—sat as one with them, and even in a privileged position.

'If only one could bring here all those who are in doubt,' said he to Polukhin, as at this moment he was filled with animation and enthusiasm.

Suddenly an order was given and the blue figures separated from the red ones. One side ran to one half of the field, the others to the other.

The match began.

When the large ball, kicked cleverly from the home side, flew in the direction of the Austrians, everyone watched with bated breath as the red and blue figures rushed after it—heading and kicking it, rushing along the grass, entangling themselves in a wild scrimmage. Then suddenly the ball would fly out again, over their heads and still nearer the Austrians, making them perturbed and uneasy.

The man in the peaked cap, giving tongue like a hound after a wolf, was screaming:

'Good! . . . Good! . . . Go on! . . .'

And when the ball was being kicked about near the enemy goal, was exclaiming imploringly:

‘Now! . . .’

He made a movement forward with the whole of his body, as if helping the home side.

But when the Austrian goalkeeper rushed towards the flying ball and, catching it in mid-air, dropped with it on to his stomach in the dust, the man in the peaked cap was the first to applaud his agility. The whole place resounded with applause. Each one looked at the other, and it could be seen by their pleased excitement that they were quite prepared to applaud the skill of the opposing team, as if showing that for them there were no *foreigners*, but that they were sportsmen all.

Kisliakof himself was unable to understand why he inwardly had sympathy with the home side, but he also began to applaud the clever moves of the opponents and derived pleasure thereby. Probably the Austrians would be pleased and would tell at home how the Russians had applauded them as well as their own side.

Glancing round idly, Kisliakof saw Maslov, the secretary of the scouts’ union. He was standing with a group of people who had been unable to get seats, near the back row.

Kisliakof nodded vigorously to him, but Maslov did not respond. Hadn’t he noticed his greeting, or was he annoyed because Kisliakof was sitting there with Polukhin? It was uncertain. But Kisliakof felt a disagreeable certainty that Maslov was closely watching his every movement from behind.

‘Perhaps he did not notice that I bowed to him. Or perhaps he is displeased because I am sitting while he has to stand somewhere at the back,’ thought Kisliakof, and he looked with irritation at the man in the peaked cap, who kept his neighbours amused by jumping up and vociferating imploringly:

‘Good! . . . Good! . . . Go on! . . . Now! . . . Once again!’

. . .

He tried not to think about Maslov, but suddenly lost all interest in the game.

THE MUSEUM WAS NOW COMPLETELY REORGANIZED. THE PEACEFUL phase of the revolution was represented by two periods—restoration and reconstruction.

In one hall were plans of the new power stations in the Volhov and Dnieper districts. An illuminated map indicated established enterprises and large factories; while large models were exhibited of the many inventions which had been brought out during the period.

In another hall models of houses showed the collective ownership of the new regime, with tractors working in the fields, and on the illuminated map, as the movement of the battle front is shown with flags, the lights showed the ever-increasing number of collective farms and Soviet farmers.

Polukhin was extremely pleased when new lights began to glow in the dark spaces; he was like a boy looking at a glittering Christmas tree.

Very few of the old colleagues, intellectuals, remained; the workers were nearly all new—scouts.

'There you have an education, my friend!' Polukhin would sometimes say, as he walked round the halls with Kisliakof. 'You just have to glance around and you can see at once the whole system as plainly as the lines of the palm of your hand; you can watch its growth from its very origin. And to think that before they were showing Tsars' hats here, and what to do with them nobody knew. Those hats are in their proper place now. I could not have done these things without you.'

'What are you saying?' said Kisliakof, as though it displeased him to hear such compliments. 'I say, and I will say again, that if you had not been here I could not have done a thing. You have put new life in me. Do you remember telling me that you had more faith in me than in some of your comrades? I felt such love towards you then as I have never felt for anyone among my own colleagues. I told myself that I would never cut myself away from you; I would never betray you. If things go wrong with you, or you are troubled in any way, you can always count on me. I shall never pass you by.'

Kisliakof went to Polukhin's study on entering the museum. He was receiving callers at the time, and, greeting him in silence, Kisliakof, with the air of an intimate friend, sat on one side of the window-sill.

Finishing his cigarette, he was about to leave when Polukhin

called him, and walking with him to the further window while the visitors were waiting in silence, began to tell him that it appeared that the scouts' group was undermining his position, and that probably trouble would ensue. As he was saying this Polukhin was twisting an unfastened button on Kisiakof's shirt. The latter listened to him with silent attention, at the same time observing Polukhin's friendly gesture of confidence—the twisting of the shirt button.

'What are they up to?' he asked, looking at Polukhin.

'They are not pleased that I am giving orders on my own initiative,' said Polukhin, and he returned to his writing desk. Kisiakof left the study and walked along the corridor. The callers who were awaiting their turn near the door made way for him and watched him out of sight, as people do when an intimate friend of their chief's leaves the room.

He accepted this attention and notice as something quite normal, and went towards the room of the scouts' union as if unaware of their glances.

He felt annoyed with the scouts' group for trying to oust Polukhin. 'They don't give him a minute's peace,' thought he. 'The man is doing his work and doing it wonderfully well; now they are trying to undermine him and ruin what he has done.'

At the same time he had reason to be perturbed on his own account as well as on Polukhin's, because of his friendship with him. He experienced a feeling of irritation against the scouts.

But with a throbbing heart he suddenly thought: Had Maslov ignored his greeting because he considered him to be a friend of Polukhin, against whom they had now opened a campaign?

Entering the room of the scouts, he found a full meeting in progress. Some were sitting in their caps at the wooden benches near the table, some on the window-sills. Others were standing about, surrounding the table at which Maslov was seated.

All faces turned to see who entered and for a second they all became silent, as people become silent when a man whom they are not certain they can speak openly before enters the room.

In the old days, on seeing that a meeting was being held, Kisiakof would have blushed and, excusing himself, would have closed the door and gone away; but now he entered boldly, showing by his whole appearance that here was a man before whom anything could be said. He approached the table and, nodding to Maslov, leaned on the shoulder of Comrade Churikov, winking at him in a friendly way.

The talk recommenced; first carefully, then more noisily, as several people began to speak at once.

The conversation was about the work of the museum and chiefly about Polukhin. They were saying that he had obviously cut

himself adrift from the people, that the scout's group meant nothing to him, that he saw nothing whatever in communal work.

'Ab-ah! That is just what I have told him!' said Kisliakof loudly.

He felt that he said this with the freedom of a man who has nothing to fear and no need to be subdued. He said what he thought and had no idea of currying favour. His honesty of thought as a man of the educated class would not have allowed him to do this and would immediately have pointed out his false move, but he wanted by speaking to ease the atmosphere and to find some explanation which would exonerate his friend.

'I have told him more than once, but he was always so anxious to earn your appreciation with a completed work,' continued Kisliakof. 'He values you immensely and puts you in the first place, because. . . .'

'We do not need the first place,' said Maslov. 'We want to find our principles expressed in the work, otherwise, although there may be valuable results from the actual work, there may be nothing in the Communist sense.'

Kisliakof felt afraid on hearing the first part of the sentence, which Maslov said in a cruel way without looking at Polukhin's defender, but the second half—about valuable results—made him sigh with relief: it was said in a softer tone, as though Kisliakof's words had made their impression.

'In other words,' continued Maslov, 'a strange thing is happening: an intellectual appears to be more intimate with us than our Communist proletarian!'

On hearing this unexpected sentence, Kisliakof could scarcely control an expression of joy. His throat moved as though he was swallowing something. He had the feeling of a soldier who caught the direct gaze of a general directed on himself and felt uneasy, and, moving forward later with fright, expecting a reprimand, finds instead that he has been awarded some high distinction.

Maslov's face, which had previously seemed unsympathetic, now appeared to him in quite a different light, and the fact that he was reserved and that it was difficult to change on to comradelike and familiar terms with him, still further enhanced the meaning of the words he had just spoken.

Kisliakof observed to himself that his defence of Polukhin had turned out very well. He had even appeared to blame him—showing by this that he was absolutely impartial—but at the same time, by asserting that Polukhin valued greatly the members of the scouts' group, he had to some extent reduced their hostile attitude.

The chief thing was that it showed that he had no need to worry.

Maslov had nothing, absolutely nothing against him; here he was admitted as one of them.

He wanted to rush to Polukhin and tell him how successfully he had defended him, but thinking that the scouts might see it in a different light and put their own construction on his conversation with Polukhin, he retraced his steps from the door of the study.

LI

KISLIAKOF FELT THAT SO FAR AS HIS WORK WAS CONCERNED HIS conversion was complete. But there still remained one slight obstacle. It was his conflict with the Budenny Detachment. The detachment, which had become still more powerful, had represented lately some unforeseen power of evil which put obstacles in the way of Comrade Kisliakof's complete transfer to the left wing.

He could not enter into the communal life of the house as he did at work. The detachment compromised him with untiring energy, and, owing to their exposures, he was the victim of an offensive from outside elements. At one time he felt that he had been left in peace, that they had forgotten him. But this was to be explained by the temporary diversion of the detachment to internal affairs. The detachment itself was also affected by partial decay; for the first time in its existence the ugly word 'embezzlement' had to be pronounced. Coarse Pechonkina's son, young Pechonkin, who had nobly resisted all temptation until now—fell into disgrace. He was the treasurer of the detachment, and when water melons arrived from the south and were heaped up in front of the fruit stalls, he wandered round the stalls like someone half-witted. His muddled brain was obsessed by one thought—to have a whole water melon on which to gorge himself. The water melon purchased by the detachment and eaten for propaganda purposes only served to revive the slumbering fires of his desire.

As a result he stole the funds of the detachment—seventy kopecks—bought a water melon and, hiding in the furthest corner of the yard, finished it up as he had planned.

This was stupid and was immediately exposed: Sania Tuzikov stumbled across him as he was devouring the last pieces, eating into the white of the rind. The juice had stained his cheeks red. He was surprised at a moment when, holding the water melon in both hands, he was biting into its depths.

The detachment was so strong in its principles and so uncontaminated by outside influences, that the case was immediately handed over for communal trial.

Several extraordinary general meetings were held in the bushes, when those of minor importance, who had suffered least of all—perhaps at the rate of one kopeck each—took the most active part in discussing the shameful downfall of one of the oldest of their members. For the time being everyone lost faith: who could be trusted? Who could be given charge of the detachment's cash

box? The ordinary members were ruled out, owing to extreme youth, for most of them could only count up to ten.

Young Pechonkin, as it seemed, was more depressed by his downfall than anyone else. No one had ever seen him in such a humiliated state. He took his oath, using the name of God (here he was stopped and showed the inexpediency of such a process), that it was the first and would be the last time. He promised that he would make good the sum stolen. When asked from what source he would get it, he hesitated and said that he would steal it from his mother. There seemed to be no end to his crime; having stolen once he proposed to repeat the offence, even if it were only from his no-account mother. This problem was debated at several meetings, but they could not come to any definite conclusions.

At last it was agreed that the theft—or helping himself, as Young Pechonkin called it—could not be allowed, since it would render it difficult to draw a line between the legal and illegal raising of funds. It was decided that the sum should be made up by instalments.

The detachment by this time had grown, owing to the enrolment of new members, and had assumed a greater importance among the occupants of the house. The more alarming for it was the unexpected blow—the exposure of decay in the very heart of the body.

They still had no territory of their own, and the editorial staff and store of the detachment continued to find accommodation in the same poor corner of the corridor. They had not even the most indispensable articles of furniture at their disposal.

Because of this the editorial and artistic work was executed in a lying position on the floor, and people, in order to pass, had to stride over the feet of the editors and collaborators, stepping very often on the papers and colours. The dogs also came on the scene (the friendly ones) and pushed their noses into the pans which contained the colours, or walked over the sheets of paper. For this reason the newspaper when published often bore the dirty imprint of dogs' paws.

While the detachment were occupied with the settlement of the Pechonkin business, Room No. 9 became vacant, and under their very noses, with the assistance of the manager of the house, it was seized by Hyppolit Kisliakof. He lived there for a few days undisturbed, firmly convinced of his rights.

The detachment opened up a campaign. In issue after issue of their newspaper they published articles exposing the deplorable conditions under which it was edited. For example, in one edition they showed: 'The presence of undesirable assistants at a meeting of the editors'—near the editors were two dogs, lying on

open sheets of the newspaper. At the same time, in each number they gave details of the life of Kisliakof and illustrated them in glowing colours. They drew a picture of his occupation of the room, the rush to beat the lady with the order from the Central Committee, and, finally, taking Room No. 6 as a precedent, they presented a corridor with an endless number of doors, each of which bore the notice: 'Room of the divorced wife of Hyppolit Kisliakof.' Probably the idea of the authors was that if Kisliakof, owing to his divorce, had to have a separate room, it was not impossible that the operation might be continued *ad infinitum*. At the same time, the detachment—a social organization—was obliged to share their poor quarters with all the dogs in the flat, which thrust their noses in the colours and put their paws on the paper when they saw people sitting on the floor.

The newspaper achieved the result that the moral rights of Kisliakof were weakening every day, even in the eyes of the adult population of the house. He himself even began to feel that he was branded. Hearing someone laugh behind him as he returned from his work, he felt that they were laughing at him; when he reached the house he was troubled by the expectation of some novelty which this evil power would present him with to-day.

The whole of his private life was poisoned. He lived as under a glass roof, through which dozens of eyes watched him. His slightest lapse was reflected on the drawings which the detachment pasted on the walls.

The unsettled feeling—it was almost one of doom—allowed him neither the desire nor the possibility of arranging his room decently. . . . He was certain to be turned out in the end, so what use was there in arranging it? He limited himself to buying an ordinary iron bedstead, a table and two chairs. When a pane of glass was broken he did not replace it, but merely covered the hole with the cardboard back of an old account book. His every move towards making the place more cosy would only have provoked a furious attack in the newspaper on the theme that, while separate elements of the *bourgeoisie* were bathing in luxury, the *organization* was crouching on the bare floor in the company of dogs.

At his work he was already one of them, one who was respected and recognized, but there he was obliged to be silent. He even had to avoid mentioning his domestic troubles at the museum, in order not to compromise himself on a class basis.

He was quite powerless against the offensive of the detachment—how could he answer the poisonous attacks which they directed against him? He had already complained, without result, to the manager of the house. It was impossible to resort to force and give the authors of these insinuations a good hiding. These were

not separate individuals but a collective force which knew that its power lay in unity and organization. Could he go to court? Against whom? Children, of whom the eldest was thirteen and the youngest three? Everyone would laugh at him, and at the same time it was not a laughing matter. . . .

Even if he said that he would go to court would not the children's parents come to their protection and drag into broad daylight such details of his life story as the famous party?

How could he counter them? Their greatest misdemeanour of which he had been witness, was the purloining of a rubber ball which had come over the wall from another yard.

All that remained was a system of assistance and bribery; such as the repair of the same rubber ball, or an offer of sweets which appeared in his pocket as if by chance. But the older members and leaders of the detachment were on the alert and forbade the masses in their eagerness for sweets to lower themselves before the enemy, who had to be attacked without the slightest sign of weakening.

The manager of the house, who had previously taken his part, as in the matter of the occupation of the new room, studiously avoided him after having been mentioned in the newspaper. When Kisliakof went to complain to him he at once made it appear that he was busy and hurried away. When Kisliakof took him unawares he listened to him with humiliating indifference, glancing out of the window as though the subject bored him.

Once he even said:

'I'll tell you what. . . . Go and find some other place. In any case, you cannot live here; it is impossible for you in your position to fight those little devils.'

Kisliakof felt that his heart stopped beating at the unexpectedness of such an utterance. He wanted to ask in an offended tone: 'What do you mean by my position?' but for some reason he withheld the question. He felt uneasy for the whole day, because he had not asked, thereby giving the manager reason to think that he understood his position very well and thought it best to remain silent. The momentary fright which he had experienced on hearing this remark had robbed him of the courage to ask the manager what he meant by it: probably some offence of which he himself was not aware had been recorded against him!

But what? . . . Nor could he go to the manager after some time had elapsed. He was obliged to strain his memory, shrugging his shoulders and putting his pince-nez on and off, in an effort to understand what the manager had been hinting at. It was all right if he only regarded him as a man of the educated class who had less rights than the Budenny Detachment . . . but what if it was something else?

From that moment he tried to avoid the manager of the house when he approached him, and when the manager was walking behind him he experienced an uncomfortable feeling in his spine.

There was one thing left—he must escape to some place where he was not known.

He had great luck. By a miracle he found a room in a distant part of the town. . . . Thus he surmounted the last remaining obstacle.

LII

HIS NEW ROOM WAS ON THE FIFTH FLOOR OF AN ENORMOUS HOUSE across the river. The first thing he did was to go to the house manager's office. A man in a double-breasted suit, with hair which had long needed cutting, was seated there. Two other men, who looked like students or scouts, also came in.

It sometimes happens that a man adapts himself with unconscious ease to a conversation, and so it happened here. Kisliakof first of all introduced himself, offered cigarettes, and felt that he was talking with these new acquaintances as one of themselves. In a natural manner he seated himself on the table, spitting as he smoked, gave them lights from the end of his own cigarette and talked to them about his work. He was dressed in an overcoat, tall boots and an exercise shirt. These he had started to wear in order not to offend the scouts in the museum with his aristocratic appearance.

When another man in tall boots and a cap, with hands befouled with grease, entered the office, the manager said: 'Meet Comrade Kisliakof! He has come to live here.'

Kisliakof felt sincerely grateful to the manager of the house for introducing him, not as Citizen Kisliakof, not even as Hypolit Grigorievitch Kisliakof, but as *Comrade* Kisliakof. The new acquaintances treated him so well that he felt quite happy. He did not feel that in their society he was regarded as an outsider, or a stranger, whom they watched with suspicious eyes. By the next day he was already addressing all those who were concerned with the management of the house as 'thou', and kept repeating to himself: 'Comrade Kisliakof, Comrade Kisliakof.' These words sounded like music in his ears.

Kisliakof took an interest in the social work of the house; he began to ask whether they had a club, what sort of work was being done, and at the same time was enrolled as an active member.

For the first time he experienced the delights of the communal work, which at once made him known to all the other tenants in the house, and as he was very polite and ready to render any service, his advice was often sought. Nothing pleased him more, when he was going up or down the staircase, than to hear a voice behind:

'Comrade Kisliakof, my friend, do tell me what this means.'

Some workman would come to him for advice, and with a feeling of gratitude Kisliakof would explain every detail that was necessary, and would sometimes even shout additional facts as he went away.

He now felt that these people really considered him to be their comrade and he wanted to justify their confidence and goodwill.

It pleased him still more to walk about the club with the quick step of a person who is at home, to sign papers, to check some account, and to feel in his every assured movement that here he was accepted, he had entered into their life.

As he had nothing to do in his own room during his spare time, he spent it in the club or in the manager's office. If a man is always about he has nothing to hide, his whole heart is in it, and he wanted to prove by his whole attitude that he had nothing to hide, that he was wholeheartedly with them. Without performing any special duty he became indispensable to the management of the house. People went to him for advice rather than to the manager, and the manager himself often asked him to do something or explain something for him, as he had to go out on other business. Nothing gave Kisliakof greater pleasure than to do this.

When some Soviet festivity was approaching he would design the posters and organize the processions.

He decided to say nothing to Tamara about his divorce or his moving to a new room, because he was still disturbed by the thought that, tiring of her frantic rushing about, she would at last say to him:

'I have a pleasant surprise for you. . . . I am leaving Arkady, and as you have already divorced your wife, I am coming to live with you.' Against his will he would be obliged to say that he was pleased and that he had been expecting this for a long time. If he did not do this his relations with her would appear to be those of a blackguard.

The novelty of having for himself the whole of his pay made him as pleased as a child.

But a week after his removal he received a letter from Elena Victorovna, in which she demanded six months' money from him, warning him at the same time that if he refused to pay she would go to court. . He immediately sought official advice and was told that he was not obliged to pay anything, as his wife was the one who had asked for the divorce.

Greatly relieved, he returned to his room, having decided that if Elena Victorovna did go to court he would counterclaim for the things she had stolen from him.

And he pressed his head in both hands. . . .

LIII

AFTER HER INTRODUCTION TO THE FILM DIRECTOR TAMARA HAD become nervous and excitable: the time when her dreams would at last be realized had arrived. She would have work and her own place in life.

She was always going out to rehearsals and to evening parties; there were constant telephone calls, and if Kisliakof happened to be there, she would break off her conversation with him, and, going over to the telephone, would start a long talk; it seemed that her success had filled her with nervous excitement.

Her tone was strangely coquettish, she would smile and shrug her shoulders, and, holding the receiver in one hand, would run a finger of the other up and down the wall, at the same time swinging her leg. Often she laughed loudly, much more loudly than necessary, as it seemed to Kisliakof. To him this laughter was disagreeable, even disgusting. Sometimes her animated shining eyes, concentrated on the interest of her talk, would rest mechanically on the face of Kisliakof, sitting opposite, and when he made amorous signs with his eyes she would look straight at him without answering, as though she was staring at a wall, or would turn quite away from him so as not to be distracted.

Of late Kisliakof rarely found her in, and if he did see her it was usually just at the moment that she wished to go out. She would greet him hurriedly, without looking at him.

'Are you in a hurry?'

'Yes. I have to go to the studio. . . .'

'But can't you spare even one moment to come to see me?'

'I am very nervous. . . . I have a headache . . . but can't you understand that my fate is being decided and I cannot settle down?'

The thought came to Kisliakof that if she was abandoning him it was all for the best, as he would get rid of her without any scenes of friction, because except for the novelty there was little in her to attract him. But when he thought that someone else might possess her—some man to whom she would run with pleasure, whom she would allow to kiss her on the neck when she was alone with him—when he imagined this, jealousy cut into his heart like a knife and everything went dark before his eyes. It seemed at such a moment that he would stab, kill her.

'But you do love me, all the same?'

'Of course,' answered Tamara, twisting a thread round her finger.

THREE PAIRS OF SILK STOCKINGS

'You don't care about any other man?'

'You know that as a general rule I am indifferent to men.'

'Then why are you so strange?'

'Because our deception worries me.'

'Do you mean that we must put an end to it?' asked Kisliakof, with a throbbing heart.

Tamara was silent, and, throwing away the thread, examined the nails of her large hands.

'Does it mean that we must part?'

'I did not say so. My God, how nervous I am. Now I must go.'

Tamara just pressed her lips to his cheek, and, escaping from his hands, rushed out of the house.

THREE DAYS BEFORE OCTOBER 1ST—ARKADY'S BIRTHDAY—KISLIAKOF, being unable to curb his anxiety as to Tamara's relationship towards him, went to Arkady's flat to talk matters over with her, and even to go to the extent of offering to tell Arkady everything and to move to his new room, as, although he would not admit it, he could get no peace of mind because of the thought that she might be unfaithful to him. Had she not said that she was indifferent to men and that he was the only one she had any feeling for?

When Kisliakof neared the door of the flat he was annoyed to hear animated male voices, with which mingled the voice and laugh of Tamara. She was laughing as she did when she was excited.

The first thing he saw as he entered was the displeased look on Tamara's face as she glanced over the table and peered into the darkness of the entrance to see who was coming in.

At the table, which was covered with the remains of a meal and with half-empty bottles, were seated Arkady and several strangers. There was Uncle Misha, who had brought Tamara home in a taxi on the rainy day of their first meeting, and Miller, the film director upon whom her career now depended, and also a tall young man in a Caucasian cloth shirt with small shining buttons.

Tamara, with flushed cheeks, was seated on the couch, to which she had probably just moved; the men remained seated at the table.

Kisliakof was astonished by Tamara's expression. When she saw that it was he, a slight look of annoyance and momentary confusion appeared, then, moving unnecessarily the bottles and glasses on the table, she asked if he would not have something to eat.

She avoided looking at Kisliakof, who tried but could not manage to catch her eye for a moment. Her eyes only met his when she asked the question and she lowered them as he answered.

Arkady, who was already slightly drunk, got up when he appeared, and, without noticing that his serviette fell at his feet, went towards him.

'I am happy to-day! All my friends have gathered round me. There is Uncle Misha and here Levotchka, about whom you have already heard, and this is our fate and destiny—Gustav Adolphus Miller—who promises to make the greatest of actresses out of Tamara.'

'I did not promise to make the greatest of artistes, I promised to make an important one of her,' said Miller.

'Anyhow, you will make "an important one" and she will do the rest,' said Arkady, then, drawing Miller's attention to Kisliakof, he continued: 'and this is my oldest friend. Friend, this is a sacred word which the world does not understand, *does not* understand! If we could all be united in such friendship, how different everything would have been.'

With an air of condescending irony towards Arkady and dignified politeness towards the stranger, Miller got up from the table, throwing his serviette on his chair.

'Meet him . . . and these . . . they are rare people . . . if everyone was like them we should not have perished. . . . We should. . . .'

With a vague gesture in the air, Arkady sank in his chair and fumbled about on his knees, feeling probably for his serviette. Not finding it, he said:

'I never craved drink, but now I have started . . . it means the end of me! Let me roll down the slope now as Russians do, but in any case *we* haven't a chance to stand up nowadays. I am pleased that she is settled.'

Every moment Tamara was addressing herself with some sentence or another to Miller, either recalling some incident during the filming, or asking advice on one or other part of her role.

Miller toyed with the wine glass in his puffy hand and seemed somewhat confused by the excited condition of Tamara, like a teacher who is confused by the too-exalted worship of a pupil.

He tried to avoid her long and frequent gazes, and looked more often at the glass which he turned and twisted about on the tablecloth.

His European self-assurance, his reddish eyelashes and well-preserved and well-nourished face, were distasteful to Kisliakof. He was dressed in an expensive plus four suit, in which he looked like a foreign tourist. The suit seemed to indicate a disdain of the badly-dressed people of the Soviet republic, who were listening to him with respectful attention. He led the conversation with no thought about his accent.

Kisliakof took a chair at the table in front of the glass of wine which had been poured out for him and sat in gloomy silence. He assumed such an expression in order that Tamara should know his frame of mind, and she did actually glance at him several times with a worried expression, and then she herself tried to make him look at her. She asked him questions, but he did not look at her except answering and immediately avoided her glance. She got up at once and approached him with the same

exaggerated air of tenderness which he had seen her use to Arkady when they had first met.

They went out into the corridor to smoke and the window was opened to clear the room of fumes.

Kisliakof went out first, as if afraid that Tamara would come near him. She noticed this and even anxiously watched his retreating form.

In the corridor the conversation turned on Miller's work, on the artistic circle, and on women.

'The Russian woman has lost all moral standards,' said Miller. 'Give her three pairs of silk stockings and she is yours. Add a bottle of perfume in certain cases.'

Uncle Misha and Levotchka smiled, feeling probably that it would seem impolite not to agree with the foreigner.

'Have you tried?' asked Levotchka.

Puffing at his pipe, Miller nodded, and said:

'There are plenty such.'

'Yes, my word, he is a smart fellow,' said Uncle Misha.

'And has your protégée unmistakable talent?' asked Levotchka.

Miller looked round slowly at the door, then turned his indifferent pale eyes on his questioner, with an expression which said that had the person in question not been so near he would have expressed himself very definitely.

'She has a fine leg. . . .' said he, thrusting the pipe in his mouth.

Young Leva laughed and Uncle Misha again said:

'My word, a splendid fellow!'

When they all re-entered the room Tamara glanced at Kisliakof and then went into her bedroom.

Arkady seized Miller by a button and began to talk to him about something, standing near the window. Kisliakof caught Tamara's glance and understood that she wished him to follow her, but he made it appear that he had not noticed. Miller's words about her legs and about the silk stockings had revolted him, he felt that he ought to have smacked him in the face, and he was still more revolted to think that not only had he not given him a smack in the face, but had even smiled on catching his eye as he said this, and smiled mechanically as Russians smile for politeness' sake when addressed by a foreigner.

'Hyppolit Grigorievitch, come here,' called Tamara from the bedroom.

'Go on, go on, tell your secrets,' said Arkady, pushing his friend with an unsteady hand towards the door.

Kisliakof went.

Tamara stood near the dressing-table, re-arranging her hair and

rouging her lips. She stood with her back to the table and faced the door.

'What is it, what is the matter with you?' she asked in an agitated whisper, but at the same time in a tone of reproach.

'Nothing,' said Kisliakof.

'How nothing? But I can see.'

'Then it is all right if you can see.'

She looked for a long time into Kisliakof's eyes; he appeared not to notice it and picked up from the table his dagger which she had used instead of scissors when they went to the theatre.

He saw that their positions were reversed; now not he but she sought for his glance.

Tamara took the dagger from his hand and put it on the dressing-table.

'That belongs to me,' said Kisliakof obstinately, and he tried to put it into his pocket, but Tamara again took it from him and laid it on the table, as if in order to take his attention from it.

'What is the matter then?'

Kisliakof looked her straight in the eyes and said:

'I do not like the way you behave with this gentleman. You look to him as though he were some kind of god.'

Tamara's full lips suddenly parted in a smile. She put her hands on Kisliakof's shoulders and, shaking her head reproachfully, said:

'You stupid thing! . . . How stupid you are. How can you think such things? You know my relations with men. You are the first with whom I have been unfaithful towards Arkady. Now please don't annoy me,' she added in another tone.

At one moment she spoke tenderly to Kisliakof and stroked his hair, then suddenly became thoughtful. Recollecting herself again at once, she reassumed her tenderness.

'It horrifies me to think that this beast will be attracted by you and will touch you under the pretext that he must help you to take some pose which is necessary during the filming. If he did I would kill him.'

'You are mad,' exclaimed Tamara. 'I will not allow him to put a finger on me.'

'Then when do we meet?'

'My dear, give me till the first of October, by then everything will be cleared up.'

'What is to be settled?'

'My destiny. . . . I am very nervous. Just wait until the first, you know that is Arkady's birthday.'

'Yes. . . .'

She leaned tenderly against him and, glancing into his eyes, said:

'If only you knew how it pleases me to see you are jealous. . . .'

Kisliakof made a movement to embrace her, but she escaped his hands and, pressing her finger to her lips, pointed to the half-open door of the dining-room.

'Now let us go; we ought not to stay away so long.'

Then suddenly, as if wishing to clear away his last suspicions, she turned towards him and, embracing him, kissed him quickly on the lips. Then, re-arranging her hair and talking loudly, as one generally does when entering a room where others are, she went before him into the dining-room.

Miller looked at his large gold watch and, addressing Tamara, said:

It is time for us to go. They start filming in half an hour.'

'I am ready.'

Miller got up and said good-bye. Then, with the quiet expression of a man who had the right, he helped Tamara into her cloak, and she, as she put it on, looked at Kisliakof, and her eyes, passing Miller and Arkady, who was standing near, told him that she was his entirely, and her lips just noticeably shaped two words. Kisliakof understood them. They were:

'October first. . . .'

She did not even say good-bye to Arkady.

THE TWO REMAINING GUESTS ALSO LEFT. AS SOON AS THE TWO friends were alone, all the spirited animation left Arkady. Going over to the table, with an air of professional concentration, he poured out a glass of cognac and drank it at one gulp.

'Why are you drinking?' said Kisliakof. 'It isn't good for you.'

Arkady made no reply, but waved his hand with an expressive hopeless movement

'Nothing matters,' said he a little later, his eyes wandering along the table as though he was choosing something to eat, but he did not take anything and, once again waving his hand, he moved away from the table. He seated himself in an arm-chair and, lowering his drunken head helplessly on his hands, lapsed into thought.

'Now this is the end of everything; she has chosen her path. . . .' said he a few moments later. 'She starts on her own life. Yes, my friend, it is very hard to feel that you have no means of keeping near you the one whom you . . . love.'

For some time he was silent, sitting with lowered head and staring at the floor. Then he continued:

'I had my work, and thought that in it I had a reliable wall to my back and what happened beyond was no business of mine. I was doing work which was needed for all time and which they also needed; nobody could accuse me of doing it unconscientiously. There comes the great intellectual temptation: "What am I doing in the long run?" I busy myself with the prolongation of life for rats, though I myself am doomed . . . whilst I work for the life of others. A man cannot work for an alien future, for ideas are alien to him. I have felt this for a long time, but have hidden it from myself and more particularly from her. Through the medium of the unfortunate rat I have shown her the possibility of giving new health to mankind, its victory over death and its power! I did this although I had already lost faith in my own work. I used my work to keep her near me, but now she has gone her own way. She has found life and I am losing the last threads of life. I must have faith in what I believed before the cataclysm—the revolution: that truth does not need a majority of adherents, but can live in a few.'

Arkady suddenly became quite sober; his eyes began to shine with animation.

'Can one go against the current life in these things? I say now with new belief that one can. I am making a final attempt.

Both you and I believed long ago that as individuals we must remain aloof from the crowd, as the masses are blind and conservative in spite of anything revolutionary. Two are sufficient to make sure that truth has the power to survive.

'You remember I told you that people such as we two, who can see things in the same light, who are more reliable and feel more deeply than others the whole tragedy of what is happening, must set up for ourselves "a church", to maintain on the earth, even in a negligible quantity, the universal truth and *fact* which we carry within us. We do not need quantity, because quantity is no guarantee of the reality of things. Reality always ripens in individuals and in them can be kept, as in the ark of the covenant, for eternity.

'Now, you will understand what your friendship means to me, especially now when her heart leaves me and her personality begins to live independently. I have nothing left but you. You and I are lost in a desert, so that by supporting each other in purity we may keep what is left of man for the future.'

* * * *

On leaving Arkady, Hyppolit Kisliakof passed down the side street in which he had previously lived, and experienced a strange feeling as he looked, involuntarily, at his old home.

He had not seen his wife since his departure and had not even said good-bye.

As he passed the house he could not avoid looking into the entrance hall. There, near the blackboard on which was written the names of the tenants, hung a large sheet of paper; on this were pictures and caricatures in colour, with a heading along the top:

'Wall-Newspaper of the Budenny Detachment.'

'Editorial Office: Flat No. 6, Room 9.'

Room 9—that had been his former room. He walked further and thought again of Miller, with his white eyelashes and beastly round neck. His heart was pricked with jealousy, as with a needle. It was not physical jealousy (because Tamara had told him that he himself was the only man she cared for), but a spiritual jealousy, which arose from the thought that she might be more spiritually interested by some other man. And by whom? By the one who had said with cynical self-assurance that any Russian woman could be bought for three pairs of silk stockings? Kisliakof suddenly felt the long-forgotten pangs of wounded national pride.

These foreign gentlemen think that nowadays they can say what they like to us, that we. . . .

He suddenly stumbled, something fell on the pavement and at the same moment he heard:

'Where the devil are you going? Can't you see?'

This was shrieked by a hawker, who stood on the pavement with a basket of apples. Engrossed in his thoughts, Kisliakof had blundered into him, and, knocking the basket over, had scattered the apples.

'Go to perdition with your apples. I will pay for them, isn't that good enough?' He took out a five-rouble note and handed it to the hawker.

The man broke off his swearing and, taking the money, even removed his hat and thanked him.

'Who could have known!' he muttered as Kisliakof went away, 'there are all sorts of people going about nowadays; some would knock the basket over and curse you into the bargain; this one, as it happens, is all right and doesn't want you to lose over it.' Picking up the apples and wiping the dirt from them with his apron, he put them in the basket again; and Kisliakof, when it was all over, asked himself:

'Why did I give him five roubles when all the apples he had were not worth more than one, and the fellow puts them in the basket again?'

There was no answer to this.

His thoughts reverted to Miller. 'These gentlemen think they can say just what they like, straight into our faces,' thought he, as he paced down the dark street.

'The proper thing would have been to give him a good smack in the face, then he would know.' How was it that no one had said anything, but had even laughed condescendingly? He himself, it seemed, had also laughed for politeness' sake.

LVI

THREE DAYS AFTER THE PARTY AT ARKADY'S FLAT KISLIAKOF awakened in his new room in quite a special mood.

First of all, it was October 1st. The date fixed by Tamara had arrived. She had asked him not to go near her, not to ask her anything, for just three days, as she had to make some decision in her life, after which their relationship would probably continue as before.

Secondly, he envisaged with extraordinary clarity his political position. From now on he was the true friend of Polukhin, who could rely on him as he would on himself. He would tell the scouts' group that their attitude towards the director was wrong, that he was not afraid to say that he stood by Polukhin (as probably they were not so strong as they thought).

When he reached the museum, however, he was thunderstruck with the news: the group of scouts had brought about Polukhin's downfall. . . . It was said that by his individualistic management he had failed to attract the younger forces of creative work. Not once had he called them together or shown any collective habits; he had ordered them about like a general in the good old days. (Hyppolit Kisliakof had warned him). Polukhin had proved that he had completely cut himself adrift from the workmen's collective and had ignored the suggestions of the Young Communists.

But what would Kisliakof's position be now?

Of course, he was the right hand of Polukhin, who had said everywhere and to everybody that Kisliakof was a most valuable man for the work and for the revolution. How would the group of scouts look upon him, the true friend and comrade of Polukhin, now? Perhaps they would decide upon a thorough overhaul of the staff and as a first measure would kick him out after the departing Polukhin.

How could Polukhin help him? His mind was too fully occupied with his own troubles to allow him to help anyone else. Nevertheless, Kisliakof decided that he would go to him and say:

'This is the test of my fidelity, you are being persecuted but I have not abandoned you. I will go with you and work wherever you like.'

The trouble was that Polukhin was not a magnate with his own estate, but a Party man who would be sent wherever it was found necessary, and he would be sent alone, not with a staff, even though it be only one, Kisliakof. So from the practical point of view the test of 'my fidelity' was absolute nonsense.

But if he went to the scouts' group and tried to persuade the fellows, if it was not too late, not to do something stupid, that was quite a different matter. They would say: 'Of course, you defend him because he is your friend.' To this he could reply that he was not guided by friendship, which he did not for a moment deny, but merely by a sense of justice.

They would say that for them, as Marxists, justice which was made to hide wrong leadership was not worth much.

To go and see them was essential, and at the same time he would not attempt to hide his sympathy for Polukhin.

What could he say when he went in to them? If he went in to and said: 'What is the matter with you, you must be mad to discard such a good worker? . . .' this sentence would probably offend their dignity. They would look at him with astonishment and annoyance and say:

'What business is it of yours? What is your relation to us, are you our comrade or a Party man that you can allow yourself to say such things, and in such a tone?'

To this he could reply that he certainly considered himself to be their comrade: did they not smoke cigarettes with him on the window-sill? Had they not taken him into their midst, 'thou'd' him and called him 'Comrade Kisliakof'? But to mention cigarettes would probably not impress them and would place him in a ridiculous position. Then he might go in and say sarcastically, without depending on any comradely feelings: 'That's a real stroke. Soon, perhaps, you will throw out all the valuable people!'

As usual, Kisliakof was thinking aloud as he paced along the dark corridor on the ground floor, near the reference room, where he was alone. He tried to think of some other opening sentence, but at that moment two technical assistants appeared, carrying a heavy box down the stairs. They even stopped and looked at Kisliakof in astonishment, as though thinking that he was talking to some unseen spirits.

He blushed, and rushing past them, to his own astonishment, walked straight into the room of the scouts' union.

Churikov was seated within, writing at the dictation of Maslov, who was pacing up and down the room, ruffling his hair—and two other scouts.

'That's a real stroke,' said Kisliakof as he entered the room. Maslov looked round at him absent-mindedly.

Kisliakof suddenly felt that this sentence, conceived for quite a different atmosphere, sounded somewhat strange here, where people were engaged on important work.

Churikov probably did not understand this sentence in an

ironical sense, but as approval, and said, tearing himself from his writing for a moment:

'Yes, we ourselves did not expect that we should win. We thought that victory would be on the side of Napoleon.' (So they called Polukhin because of his dictatorial ways.)

It seemed to Kisliakof that it would be impossible to start explaining that he had said this sarcastically and certainly not in approval; these people also trusted him as one of themselves; he could not go to them and say:

'I am not on your side but on the side of Polukhin, and I have no intention of encouraging you.'

For this reason he merely said:

'Nor did I expect it. Clever work!'

'But we thought you were friendly with him?' asked one of the scouts.

Kisliakof saw that at this sentence, the quiet, cold gaze of Maslov rested on him. He felt his heart jump alarmingly, as though he had missed his footing at the edge of a precipice, but he pulled himself together with a desperate effort of will and said, shrugging his shoulders:

'How do you mean—"were very friendly"?'

'You were always together.'

'Always . . . in the same way a cart is always with a horse, but one cannot conclude from this that the horse is friendly with the cart.' For the first time he felt clearly that under the influence of an uncontrollable animal panic which had seized him, he had violated his honesty of thought.

They all laughed, and, having said this apt sentence, he could hardly maintain his quiet, unconcerned appearance. At the same time, although his hands were trembling, he leisurely took out his cigarettes and handed them in silence to the nearest scout. They began to smoke and Maslov again began to pace about the room and to dictate.

Then he paused before Kisliakof and said:

'Of course, you thoroughly understand the work?'

'But why, certainly I do a little.'

'Not a little, because all the work has been carried out according to your ideas.'

'Now you are exaggerating,' said Kisliakof, watching the rings of smoke as he puffed them out.

'No, as a matter of fact,' said Maslov in a serious tone, 'we are suggesting you for the post of director.'

Kisliakof nearly dropped his cigarette, he burned himself with it on hearing this sentence. He simply stroked his burnt lip and did not say a word.

He suddenly experienced a wave of warm attachment, even of love, towards Maslov, whom he inwardly disliked and feared. Why had he not understood this man before? Why had he thought that his firmness and suspicious were directed against himself? This firmness and suspicion now appeared to him as the highest attributes of Maslov, as it was particularly unusual and rare for such a man to pay any attention to him, to choose him from all the others and trust him—a man of the educated class—more than Polukhin.

‘Very well,’ said Kisliakof unconcernedly, ‘but I will not work alone. I shall harness you all to the work.’

‘That is just what is wanted,’ said Maslov, ‘we don’t want Napoleons, but we want workers with the collective instinct, those who will work with others. Then it is agreed: We are putting your nomination forward.’

‘I can tell you one thing; even if I make mistakes in the work you can rely on me as you would on yourselves.’

He could no longer control his legs; they were impatient to tear away from the spot and rush with him in some unknown direction.

Controlling himself and trying to check some strange sound which surged to his throat from the feeling of joy and gratitude which he was experiencing at such unexpectedly high valuation, Kisliakof left the room where the Scouts were gathered.

‘Wait for me, I will come with you,’ called Maslov. Kisliakof waited in the corridor. Suddenly at the other end of the corridor he saw Polukhin. The blood flowed from his heart. Not knowing why or how, he turned away and walked quickly in the opposite direction, as though retreating from a gun which was levelled at him and would go off at any moment.

Polukhin saw him and shouted:

‘Hyppolit.’

It was the first time that he had called him by his Christian name; Kisliakof’s heart trembled, but he could already hear Maslov’s footsteps, and he made it appear that he had not heard the call of his friend and, quickening his step, he rushed down the staircase.

He did not know how all this happened. His blood froze when he thought that Polukhin might have taken him by the arm at the moment Maslov appeared, and only when he rushed into the cloakroom did he feel that, *after this*, it would be impossible, inconceivable for him to meet Polukhin; better that he should fall through the earth.

WHEN HE REACHED THE ENTRANCE HALL SERGEY IVANOVITCH handed him a note which he said had been delivered by a man in a 'strange condition'.

Kisliakof opened the note:

'Please come. I must see you at once to talk things over. Arkady.'

The brevity of the note and the scrawl gave the impression that something was wrong. It was not like an ordinary invitation; probably something had happened. A thought suddenly passed through Kisliakof's mind and made his heart jump and miss a beat; perhaps Arkady had discovered his connection with Tamara. Perhaps she, in despair after one of her usual disappointments, had told him everything; or something else might have happened. To-day was October 1st, the date fixed by Tamara.

If she had told Arkady everything, how could he look his friend in the face?

Of course, he could say:

'Yes, my friend, this happened to me because I have lost that without which a man cannot live: the highest purpose and sense of life. There is nothing in me now—nothing sacred. I have lost my sense of distinction; I seized upon this passion as something which would save me from this terrifying inner emptiness; I tried to believe in what I am now doing; it seemed that I began to like the people with whom I work. I tried in every way to strengthen this liking because it helped me to put sincerity into my work and offered the possibility of thinking honestly. It seemed to me that I was wholeheartedly with them; but am I? The question which troubled me most was whether it was fear rather than liking. Did I only like these people as my saviours from physical destruction? Perhaps there was only fear of destruction in my heart; no love for anyone, but just the terror that people would get to know my inner self.'

He could also say:

'You see that I have no real existence. I do not know myself in what way I am real . . . this is actually the end. . . . Can you not see that I, perhaps, am more unhappy than you. . . . For this reason, forgive me if you can.'

But to reveal to someone else that which he himself was afraid to think of required too great an effort and was too terrifying.

Why should he reveal this last disconcerting truth?

* * * *

I must learn to look on things in a different light. In my relative beauty I had a weapon which never fails. Though it be relative it will be enough *for business*. I told myself that I would nerve myself to exploit it for business. I would cynically and frankly call things by their proper name—this is only frightening at first.

'I insisted that M. should transfer to Moscow and get Arkady there: how to do it was his business. He must also find a flat.'

Arkady stopped and sat for some time with averted gaze. Then he continued:

'For a long time M. was opposed to it. L. was enraged and threatening, but I got what I wanted. I am in Moscow. I have learned to see things as they are. When I had got what I wanted from M., I showed him the door. I told myself: No love affairs, be level-headed and look after the goods.'

At this point Arkady put the letter down, and, getting up, turned hurriedly towards the window and stood there for a long time.

Kisliakof had listened to the letter with the feeling of a prisoner who has heard the death sentence passed on his accomplices in the crime and expects that at any moment the silence will be broken by the pronouncement of his own name.

Arkady seated himself again. His face was terrible to see, his cheeks were sunken and unshaven and his eyes burned with some mad light. He continued to read:

'I was introduced to a film producer, who judged me as a film actress with a great future and certainly as a woman, chiefly the latter. I warned myself that I must be careful and look after the goods. When he has done something for me, then he can have what he wants. But this was at our first meeting. Later, I felt so tender towards him, such delicacy and real tenderness, which he even tried to avoid recognizing. I felt this and thanked fate for giving me two joys at once—an outlet to life and . . . love.

'M. and L. even had the temerity to come and dine at our house, and I, in my happiness, forgetting evil and looking over their abominable behaviour, was kind and affable towards them.'

The name of Hyppolit Kisliakof had still not been mentioned. Each new sentence made him expect that at any moment Arkady would name him. It would have been easier to sit on burning coals than to hear, line by line, such a story. . . .

'Arkady was like a kind nurse to me, but I was certainly only unhappy with him.'

Arkady's face twitched, but he went on:

'I am leaving, filled with hope and with a new faith in life. First we go to Odessa, then abroad for two whole months.

'In my Moscow life story I have passed over one other affair which also was the result of extreme despair and emptiness and

gave me absolutely nothing. At first I imagined something romantic in him. Now, looking on him with sober eyes, I see. . . .

'The letter ends there,' said Arkady, putting the sheet of paper aside and removing his spectacles.

'Is that all?' asked Kisliakof excitedly, as though he had been told that the sentences had been pronounced and he had not heard his own name.

'Yes, all,' answered Arkady, throwing his spectacles on the table and getting up. 'What more could one have?'

His whole body trembled.

'You can assume that M. and L. are Uncle Misha and young Leva, "my best friends" during my stay in Smolensk. I always knew that there was a type of blackguard known as "friends of the house" and that cultured people often played such a role; but not now when we must preserve the last small particles of our creed. I even talked to them about "the church" as I have talked with you . . . and they listened. . . . They listened! Oh, what baseness! . . . I now begin to think that our universal truth, as you might call it, does not remain with us . . . that it decayed long ago.'

He said this as though he was in a delirium. He no longer walked, but rushed about the room like a wounded beast, and the light of the candle cast his gigantic shadow on the walls and the ceiling. His forehead was covered with perspiration and his hair was dishevelled. When the flame of the candle flickered, his shadow seemed to fill the whole room.

'Understand . . . these men, who are considered to be decent people, first one and then the other, visited me, talked about the destiny of the Fatherland, ate my bread and slept, one after the other, and I don't know how, with my wife! What more do you want? How much further could they go?'

'If such a thing happened with a man of the educated class, he would first of all ask himself: "What is wrong with me; I can do such a blackguardly thing and not feel the baseness of it? It means that the mainspring is broken within me." They, believe me, neither feel nor think anything about a spring. They visited me throughout the winter. Perhaps they shared her by mutual agreement. . . . Oh, my God, to what limits can baseness go? . . .'

He covered his eyes with his hands and his face could again be seen twitching. Then he continued, feverishly, hurriedly:

'But if a man does not think to put himself this terrible question, it means . . . everything is finished. It means degeneration . . . the last dance on the grave of one's own soul.'

'Now there you exaggerate,' said Kisliakof.

'How exaggerate?' shrieked Arkady with new force. 'My dear friend, when the mainspring is broken in a man, when he loses his guiding principle, how can he live? By what means? I can no longer live by my science, because I know, I feel, that we are finished. The future belongs to another race. Understand . . . another race. The workmen . . . are another race . . . a race having nothing in common with us. It is another faith and nothing can be done about it. Rats I can rejuvenate, but a class in which the mainspring is twisted cannot be rejuvenated; it is impossible.

'And such facts as this'—with a trembling finger he pointed to the letter—'such facts prove that the mainspring is twisted, definitely twisted. I will not say that this Uncle Misha and Levotchka were such friends in the sense that you and I are friends. That, thank God, was not the case, but all the same, they were people who were dear to me, my friends, whom I (oh, the holy simplicity) welcomed with open arms. They knew, knew, that Tamara was my only hope; knew that I loved her beyond all telling, with an uplifted, clean feeling, and all the same they . . . my God. Where is the limit? Is there none? Do you understand? There is no limit,' said Arkady, standing before his friend and looking at him with wandering eyes.

'And didn't you notice anything?' asked Kisliakof.

'No. It would never have entered my head. She adopted an attitude of simplicity of intercourse with them. Met them as dear friends, as relations. Called them "thou", embraced them when they met like brothers or friends of her childhood, only sometimes it seemed strange to me that she seemed to use every pretext to get me out of the house when they were coming. For some reason on such occasions it always seemed necessary that all sorts of things must be bought. But notice anything, that I never did. Somehow I did not know the ways of deceit, I myself had never employed them.'

He sat near the table, as though he had lost all his strength.

'I did not mean to say,' continued Arakdy, 'that either one or the other was my friend in the same degree as you are. One can have many friends, but there can only be one who is *the* friend. There can only be one such relationship which produces great ideas, in which the friend is receptive to your life-creating ideas. You alone have been such a friend for me, but it has been my lot to place before you, not the idea of creating life, but of death. But in his case, too, one needs a friend, as, faced with this death, death of the highest order, to remain alone is really too terrible. You understand now what you mean to me? My last support. . . .'

Arkady sat for some time motionless, his elbows on the table and his face covered with his hands.

In the whole scene there was something upsetting, something terrifying, either in the feverish appearance of Arkady or from the dull light of the solitary candle on the dark window, outside which the autumn wind howled and rustled in the naked branches.

Suddenly a laugh came from behind the hands covering Arkady's face.

Hearing the laugh, Kisiakof trembled and felt afraid.

Arkady continued to laugh, but when he exposed his face it was like a lifeless, expressionless mask. Only the lower part was laughing.

'To-day is my birthday. . . . The first of October. . . . If one thinks! . . .' said he. 'To think that of all my friends you *alone* were not her lover. It is enough to send one mad. . . . Only one! . . . ?'

Suddenly a woman's footsteps were heard in the corridor.

For some reason both friends turned pale and looked round at the door with an expectant, inexplicable fear.

The door opened. On the threshold stood Tamara. In her lowered hand she held mechanically a parcel wrapped in newspaper, as though it had been thrust there and there it had remained. She stood leaning against the doorpost as if exhausted.

All were silent.

At last, as if with an awakening glance, she looked at both friends and, dropping the parcel, ran into the bedroom.

Arkady and Kisiakof sat motionless.

Arkady got up, and, picking up the parcel, opened it. In it were three pairs of silk stockings. He looked at them with an uncomprehending stare.

Kisiakof rushed into the bedroom, but the moment he disappeared behind the door an inhuman cry came from within, and there was the sound of something heavy and soft falling on the floor.

Kisiakof ran out again. He had a look of terror on his face. He seized the candle from the window. When they entered the bedroom they saw on the floor, near the tall-backed walnut chair, Tamara, pressing both hands on the floor and lying strangely twisted; from beneath, her blood trickled in a winding stream into a pool on the floor. Under the arm-chair the Caucasian dagger had been thrown. It had entered the heart under the left breast. As in a trance, Kisiakof heard the words of Miller repeated in his brain:

'Any Russian woman can be bought for three pairs of silk stockings.'

**Published by Susil Gupta (India) Ltd
36, Chowringhee, Calcutta.**

**Printed by M. K. Mukerjee at the
Temple Press, 2, Nayaratna Lane, Calcutta.**

